Preventing School Violence

Rudolfo Barcena Rulloda

NorthCentral University

May 25, 2011

Abstract

School violence has mushroomed into a devastating epidemic and deteriorating the basic foundation of education. In this article, the author will present several teaching strategies for preventing school violence from becoming an arduous enigma within the classroom and school environments, and focus on assessment and reflection in order to foster effective student learning that would eventually improve students' academic performance. And by implementing these concepts, the author would also improve his personal teaching practices.

Introduction

      The Center for the Prevention of School Violence defined school violence as "any behavior that violates a school's educational mission or climate of respect or jeopardizes the intent of the school to be free of aggression against persons or property, drugs, weapons, disruptions, and disorder." School violence occurs daily and appears in many forms. To illustrate, vandalism is a common incident and in an elementary school where the author first taught, over the weekend several people tore the handle of the classroom door and took PE supplies and materials, and later the school district devised a new handle and replaced all of the handles on every classroom door throughout the school district. At another school, where the author was a substitute teacher, the principal came over the PA system and wanted the group of male students, who were throwing rocks at the traffic, to come to the office. In another situation, several high school students were suspended from school following a drinking incident after their prom Saturday night (Benjamin, 2011). The schoolyard bully is a serious problem at any school campus, and a study conducted by the Committee for Children victims of bullying in the elementary schools indicated that 78% of children in Grades 3-8 experienced bullying within the previous month and about 5% to 6% experienced severe bullying Osterman and Kottkamp (2004).

      School violence is also spreading into the community, where trash is littered throughout the neighborhood, young trees are broken or bent, and abandon homes are boarded and covered with graffiti and lawns are brown. The school, where most school violence occurred, witnessed many of their neighbors move to better neighborhoods and excellent schools.

      The run-down neighborhood is becoming a breeding ground for perpetrators and they are escalating school violence to a new level. Case in point, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) indicated a dismal picture of nonfatal student victimization, where in 2006

there were 29 violent crimes, such as rape, both sexual and aggravated assault, and robbery, at school per 1,000 students; in 2007, about 32% of students reported being bullied during the school year; about 4% of students reported being cyber-bullied in 2007; and children who bully are more likely to get into fights, vandalized property, skip school, and drop out of school.

As school violence becomes prevalent on many school campuses, teachers are worried about school safety instead of providing adequate quality education for their students. For instance, Stix (2008) reported that between 1996 and 2000, there were 599,000 violent crimes against teachers at school. Further, on average, in each year from 1996 to 2000, about 28 out of every 1,000 teachers were the victims of violent crime at school, and three out of every 1,000 were victims of serious violent crime such as sexual assault and aggravated assault. Locally, an incident at an elementary school, where the author was still part of the assessment team and was administering a test, a school staffer was typing and asking questions to students from the second grade class because a second grade student threatened to assault his teacher with a pair of scissors. The student in question was in the process of being suspended from school.

Purpose

School violence has mushroomed into a devastating epidemic and deteriorating the basic foundation of education. In this article, the author will present several teaching strategies for preventing school violence from becoming an arduous enigma within the classroom and school environments, and focus on assessment and reflection in order to foster effective student learning that would eventually improve students' academic performance. And by implementing these concepts, the author would also improve his personal teaching practices.

Discussion

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) described several factors on the students' characteristics likely to commit violent acts and these are: poor academic performance, poor behavioral control, deficits in social, cognitive, or information-processing abilities, antisocial beliefs and attitudes, social rejection by peers, exposure to violence, and lack of involvement in conventional activities. Several of these factors are traceable to the classroom environment, while the other factors are beyond the school campus. Harding (2009) further explained that violence is a critical social characteristic of disadvantaged neighborhoods, where some of these schoolyard bullies have older brothers or relatives associated with street gangs in the neighborhoods or have family members in the prison system.

The Center for the Prevention of School Violence and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) emphasized the word, "behavior," as a key component to school violence. Slavin (2000) described behavior as an observable behavior that is learned by environmental influences such as students residing in a poor neighborhood, students returning home from school to broken families where one or more parents are unemployed or on drugs, and parents having no or limited formal education cannot help their students' on their homework assignments. Thus, these environmental influences have an impact on students' learning abilities as well. In addition, Berger (2003) explained that behavior does not occur in specific stages.

Teacher Intervention Process

The author has the most important role in developing his students' readiness within the educational system. And the author must first establish the trust, that relationship between students and author whereby students have confidence in the author, which is the overall important key to teacher's intervention; without trust, the learning process of having a suitable learning environment for effective student learning goes off course.

Trust can be acquired as simple as the author displays a happy face and provides optimistic comments (Kalis, Vannest, and Parker, 2007) at the students at the blacktop in the mornings, where students would have a sense of comfort that it will be a good day in class. These little greetings might be the only time students' encountered such experiences, where many of their parents overlook these little amenities. This simple task is part of students' instruction for developing social skills. Schoefeld, Rutherford Jr., Gable, and Rock (2008) defined social skills as a set of competencies that promotes positive social relationships, contributes to peer acceptance and friendship development, leads to satisfactory school adjustments, and allows students to cope and adapt to the demands of the social environment. In addition, the author plays classical music in the classroom to calm down the students, as the students placed their backpacks at the corner of the classroom and wait for the morning announcements. Also, there are times when the students are having a rough day such as catching up with assignments, due to fire or lockdown drills or musical assemblies, the author would stop the activity and take the class for a walk around the school playground and do several and simple exercises before returning from the outdoors and continue with their school work. The author would also let the students know that if they cannot complete their assignments, they can continue where they left off the next day.

Once trust is established, the author has formed the basic attitude of the students' education. The students would have confidence in themselves and at the author, where they then begin to explore new concepts and ideas within the confine of the classroom and school campus.

Teaching Strategies

Before teaching can be productive, the author creates and implements effective classroom management and student discipline strategies, which would provide the learning environment for improving students' academic performance. Iverson (2003) defined classroom management as

supervising relationships, behaviors, and instructional settings and lessons, where its objectives are to prevent and decrease incidences of discipline problems such as chronic truancy, school vandalism, bullying, and tagging. And student discipline is further defined as teaching students how to behave appropriately that are socially acceptable.

Classroom management.

There are several best practices for effective classroom management that would minimize disruptive behavior and increase learning. First, by establishing classroom rules on the first day of class, with the collaboration of the author and students, where the students would suggest the acceptable and unacceptable behaviors (Iverson, 2003), and by this process, students would have a sense of empowerment and develop decision making skills. Secondly, for the first few days of school, the author would observe the students working on their assignments. In this approach, the author is conducting a preliminary assessment of each student by answering some of these questions: "Does the student work well with his/her neighbors? Why?" "Is the student completing assignments on time? Why?"

Student discipline.

Observation, dialogue, and documentation are key components in collecting information and examining the information to check if the students are reaching their objectives. Through observation, for example, the author is able to observe the students' abilities such as running with friends at the playground and traits such as helping another students getting up after the student fell or attempting to cut in line at the lunch line. Hence, the students are demonstrated their ability that comes naturally with little effort of teaching required, except for the student trying to cut in front of the line. And in that case, the author would go to the student and inform the student that his/her behavior was inappropriate and inform the student to walk back to the

end of the line. The author would pay close attention and making sure the student stays in the back of the line, which would also serve as a deterrent to other students from copying the inappropriate behavior.

Effective Teaching

The first key component in effective teaching is for the teacher to understand the basic principle of teaching: all students have different ways of learning. And the second key component in effective teaching is: the teacher needs to understand the various teaching models in order to focus on the students' learning process and implement the appropriate teaching models that would enhance students' learning.

Picture-word inductive.

This particular teaching model has a multidimensional curriculum, which is ideal for Asian, Hispanic, Afro-American students and students with learning disabilities, who are struggling in reading and writing (Joyce, Weil, & Calhoun, 2009), and the outcome from this teaching model would increase students' achievement substantially.

To illustrate a teaching strategy, the author would take class for a walk around the neighborhood, and while the author is pointing to the names on signs and posters, the advanced students would take pictures of the signs and posters. On the way back to class, the students would be collecting paper trash in the neighborhood for the school's recyclable program and this would reflect on their character building of citizenship, responsibility, caring, and respect. And in the classroom, the students would write in their journals about their experience.

With the pictures, the author and students would list the words from the signs and posters, and later, the students write five sentences about the objects in the pictures for three minutes. Eventually, the author's "fun" activity is by showing the pictures before the class ends

for the day and have the students read the words on the signs and posters, where students must read correctly before they can start lining up by the door. The diverse students would be learning about their neighborhood and be able to read, speak, and write sentences quickly and increase their vocabulary. In this teaching strategy, the students would improve their self-esteem and learn to control their behavior. In addition, the students would be developing their cognitive process of metacognitive control, meaning learning how to learn.

Cooperative learning.

Joyce et al. (2009) defined the process as students working together. In this method, minority students with limited English would develop their spatial, linguistic, social skills, promote motivation, where feelings of connectedness produce positive energy, and where each student learns from each other, and the socialization would increase learning and increase self-esteem.

Cartledge, Singh, and Gibson (2008) further indicated that there is a reciprocal relationship such as cooperating, helping, sharing, and consoling between academic and social behaviors because of the evidence that neutralized or reduced problem behaviors result in increased academic gains. In addition, social-skill instruction is a proactive, positive intervention, which consisted of telling the students what the behaviors are, showing the students how to perform the behaviors, giving the students ample opportunities to practice the behavior with corrective or reinforcing feedback, and program for behavior maintenance and transfer. And to be culturally relevant, social-skill needs to reflect the lifestyle and experiences.

Partnership.

Joyce et al. (2009) argued that this is an important component in the cooperative mode where students generate their willingness to learn. Since the minority students with limited

English need to speak and hear the English language regularly, the author would experiment and enhance cooperative learning by having retired, senior citizens to volunteer to work with the minority students. The retired, senior citizens would also be modeling appropriate behavior and provide the English dialogue, where the minority students would increase their proficiency in English and self-image by participating in classroom activities.

Group investigation.

This where students come together and solve a problem and this teaching model addresses students' interpersonal problems. For example, the playground bullies pose a problem to the primary grade students. The students would present the problem in the classroom and the author would guide the class as to what might happen if they take matters on their own. Later, the author would let the students brainstorm the problem and to provide possible alternative solutions, which would be listed on the overhead and later the students would vote on the list of possible solutions in solving the problem.

Joyce et al. (2009) argued the favorable perception for group investigation, which are: generates motivation, where it provides the feeling of connectedness; members learn from each other; produces cognitive as well as social complexity; increases positive feeling towards each member of the group; and increases self-esteem. In addition, this activity would develop the students' character such as: caring, citizenship, and responsibility.

Nondirective teaching model.

The author's goal is to help students understand their own needs and values so that they can effectively make their own educational decisions. Also, the students do the learning and interact with the learning environment, where the classroom environment is organized to help

students attain greater personal integration, effectiveness, and realistic self-appraisal Joyce et al. (2009).

This is an ideal situation whenever students are in centers. To illustrate, one group would be with the author and another group with the classroom aide. At the third table, there should be several activities, with simple instructions where the students would decide which activity they wish to work on. In this process, the students are developing their reading skills and decision making skills. When the author calls for the changing of tables, the students at the nondirective teaching table would hand in their work to the author for assessment and evaluation and later filed in students' portfolios.

In another form of nondirective teaching, where the students are from diverse cultures, the author would have the students learn how their cultures impact the school environment. For instance, since there are over one hundred different cultures in this school district, the author would have the minority students greet the school in various languages for the morning announcements. This would promote awareness of the different cultures in the school and generate a sense of school pride for the school for having so many different cultures. Expanding this activity might include the students' parents. In this fashion, the author would ask the office to have an event for parents to come to the school with their country's wardrobes and speak, even if they have no knowledge of the English language, where the school district would likely have an interpreter, and talk about their native countries and forms of education. This would give the parents a sense of being part of the school environment and community. The most important aspect of this activity is to have the parents' eyes and ears on the school for suspicious activities when everyone is gone for the day and during the weekends and holidays.

Integration

Tanner and Tanner (2007) explained the concept where traditional lessons are absorbed into a larger learning process that would relate the curriculum to the life of the students. The traditional lessons are taught in segments, and they do not take into account that all students have different learning styles. Integration is practical in a teaching method where the teacher is able to teach and assess the students at the same time.

Multiple intelligences.

The author finds multiple intelligences a great benefit to the students' learning experience. Gardner (2006) described "intelligence" as abilities, talents, or mental skills and "multiple" as the different attributes such as musical intelligence, bodily/kinesthetic intelligence, logical/mathematic intelligence, linguistic intelligence, spatial intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, intrapersonal intelligence, and naturalist intelligence constitutes the individuals' learning spectra.

Diaz-Lefebvre (2004) suggested the use of multiple intelligences across the curriculum provide students with a variety of creative, imaginative learning options; while, Magda (2009) described the consequence for using multiple intelligences, which is by helping students with limited English through cooperative learning and Garcia (2010) indicated that Hispanic and the economically disadvantaged students would increase their reading and math achievement.

Multiple intelligences are also pathways to creative thinking; for example, the author, as a student teacher at the university, had the opportunity to hear Dr. Edward de Bono, the leading authority of creative thinking, discussing his book, *Six Thinking Hats*, and where Dr. Edward de Bono emphasized that children are creative and as teachers, we should observe them often and generate ideas from the children.

In the article, "Curriculum Integration" by Teaching Today indicated that students learn best when curriculum are related to each other and connected to real-life experiences, where

students examine concepts and themes to see how they "fit" together, and where the students learn best by doing. Slavin (2000) also suggested that at the elementary school level, especially third grade, the students have transitioned to a new developmental stage, from a preoperational thought to a stage of concrete operations, and at this stage, the students are developing memory and cognitive skills, including metacognitive skills, meaning the ability to think about their own thinking and to learn how to learn.

Armstrong (2000) further suggested the four major reasons for implementing multiple intelligences and these are: first, each of us has all of the eight intelligences; second, when taught correctly, many of us can develop all of the eight intelligences to a competent level; and finally, intelligences are enhanced when a few or many of the intelligences work together. Lazear (2003) also indicated that multiple intelligences promote deep and lasting understanding in students. In addition, Gray and Waggoner (2002) suggested that multiple intelligences have the potential of reaching a greater number and broader range of learners. Lazear (2003) described three different ways of teaching multiple intelligences and these are: first, as subject content, where teachers might consider teaching intelligence separately; as an example, the author considers teaching linguistic intelligence to the class because of a significant number of students of diversity in the classroom. Secondly, a process to acquire knowledge, where author would use this technique for the students to gain knowledge beyond the single intelligence; to illustrate, besides teaching linguistic intelligence, the author would also add spatial intelligence, since most students learn through this process. And finally, metaintelligence, meaning the thinking and analyzing of one's own thinking process, teachers might consider using this approach for all of their students.

Lazear (2003) further stressed this process by incorporating all of the intelligences into one lesson because the students obviously learn when taught from many ways, the students would tend to remember what is taught, and the students would fully understand their intelligences and eventually their intelligences become part of the students' profile.

Curriculum integration.

By integrating tradition lessons with multiple intelligence, a new paradigm emerge, where this new image is student oriented and where students have the opportunity to discover, and explore their capabilities and strengths for effective learning. The students would find this new paradigm interesting and beneficial.

At the dinner table, the child hears this familiar quote, "When you finish all of your vegetables, you can be excused and play on your computer." This also goes well in the education system. For example, at the start of the school year, the author informed the students if they want to attend the county fair in October, they must complete all classroom and homework assignments, have less than three absences, always pay attention to the author and school staff, and never be in trouble in the classroom. This is a teaching strategy where classroom and school character building of responsibility and citizenship are reinforced.

In October, the class, along with the other third grade classes (interpersonal intelligence), took a field trip (naturalist intelligence) to the county fair. The students listened to the other teachers and bus driver on instructions (spatial intelligence and linguistic intelligence) while on the bus. At the fair grounds, the students also listened to the various announcements and music over the PA system (spatial intelligence, musical/rhythmic intelligence, and linguistic intelligence), walked through the fair ground, purchased snacks at various food vendors, and touched the animals at the barnyard (bodily/kinesthetic intelligence, logical/mathematical intelligence linguistic intelligence, and spatial intelligence), asked questions about the animals to some of the exhibitors (spatial intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, and linguistic intelligence), attempted to count eh lambs, as the lambs frolic here and there (spatial intelligence, bodily/kinesthetic intelligence, naturalist intelligence, and logical/mathematical intelligence), learned about the various categories such as sheep in one area of the barn, goats in another area

of the barn, and chickens in another area of the barn (spatial intelligence, naturalist intelligence, and logical/mathematical intelligence), and read the different types of bulletins and posters describing the fair along the midway (spatial intelligence and linguistic intelligence). After the country fair, the students wrote in their journals reflecting about their experience, their feelings about the county fair and what they learned at the county fair (spatial intelligence, bodily/kinesthetic intelligence, intrapersonal intelligence, and linguistic intelligence).

The students were assessed on their behavior on the bus and at the fair grounds and how they acted with the other students from the other classrooms, other teachers, bus driver, and public through observation, dialogue with the other teachers/bus driver, and their journals, which would be included in the students' portfolios.

Assessment

There are two types of assessments for the teacher to understand students and learn about the teaching process. These are separately conducted as an on-going process throughout the school year. The assessments include: student assessment and the teacher's assessment.

Student assessment.

There are two types of assessments in the classroom; one, in a student-centered environment, where the students are developing and learning to use all of their capabilities, the nontraditional assessment process is used. An example is through observation, dialogue, and documentation, where the author would walk around the class and observe students working on their assignments, and ask questions mentally as: what has he/she learned from the assignment and why is it important (Dietz-Uhler & Lanter, 2009). The students' assignments are collected and filed in the students' portfolios.

Having the students conduct self-assessments are another form of nontraditional assessment. Bingham, Holbrook, and Meyers (2010) argued that this process returns voice and ownership to students and basically, it is about self-improvement, where students shift through different levels of awareness as they move from lower thinking to higher levels of metacognitive thinking.

In the traditional, the high-stakes standardized testing is the official document on students' academic performance and using this form of assessment, the author would have a general idea where the students' academic weaknesses and strengths of the students' performance. From the information obtained, the author would incorporate an integration curriculum, where the students' strengths can reinforce and strengthen the students' weaknesses (Armstrong, 2000; Stemberg & Grigorenko, 2004).

The author might also use Joyce et al. (2009), Concept Attainment Model, learning a new process from current assignment, as an assessment tool to determine if important ideas introduced earlier have been mastered and where the students would learn a new concept from the present activity. This model is ideal for advanced students who completed their assignments early and provides an incentive for the rest of the student to make an effort to reach this level. This model also has a unique, salient feature by providing the students a process to develop their intrapersonal intelligence that correlates to their character building of responsibility.

Journals.

Davis (2008) suggested that journaling is like having a conversation with another, highly responsive and reflective persons. It is an on going process where activities are implemented daily and means of two-way communication between author and students. One method where Pavlovich, Collins, and Jones (2009) conducted a study, where learning journals were used as a method of developing self-awareness, and the findings were: the subjective voice that enables

students to access their inner learning; accepting that learning is mutually constructed within a corrective space rather than something "done to the student," and that a more reflective self-awareness engages a higher sense of personal purpose.

Portfolios.

Portfolio is a tool for reflection because it focuses on growth in learning, as well as description and critique of practice Osterman and Kottkamp (2004). Graziano-King (2007) suggested that effort to assess student writing is through the self-revised essay. This requires that students, at the beginning of the school year, write an essay in response to a prompt that reflects their likes and dislikes about school and what activities they experienced before school started. Then, every month, the students revisit, reflect on, and revise their writings, with all reflections and revisions taking place in class. The result is a multi-drafted essay, written independently. As an assessment tool, it offers the best of the portfolios; it reflects current views of the students' writing, which would allow the author and the students' parents to have full confidence that the students are the sole authors of their work. In this activity, the students are developing their memory and cognitive skills, including metacognitive skills.

Teacher assessment.

In order to improve the author's teaching practices, there are two avenues to take and these are direct observation and the use of videotapes. Direct observation is a method where the author would have a fellow teacher observe the author's teaching process. Later, the fellow teacher would critique the author's behavior and teaching process and from the feedback, the author learns, if changes need to be taken feedback.

The use of videotapes is also a tool for learning about teaching practices. York-Barr, Sommers, Ghere, and Montie (2006) suggested that videotaping is a means as an objective

record of what actually took place in a specific instructional context, where the purpose of using this method is to specifically examine and reflect on instructional practice, and not to evaluate. In essence, the author would increase his understanding of reflecting on the video, and become more aware of habits and mannerisms such as discovering how the author is reacting with his students.

Reflection

Osterman and Kottkamp (2004) indicated that reflective practice offers a better perspective on school reform and meaningful change in the school environment and in the individuals. Reflective practice provides productive engagement of conflict, a better way to understand differences and to support productive engagement of conflict. Understanding can also result in decreased judgment and recognition of different values, experiences, and priorities.

York-Barr et al. (2006) also argued that there are several benefits for implementing reflective practices. First, it provides direction for educators in a different role. In this new role, educators become facilitators. A facilitator's role is to keep the discussion moving until solutions are established and a role where educators become change agents. Second, reflective practice provides cultural awareness. This would give educators a better understanding and be able to relate to their minority students. And finally, reflective practice provides a sense of efficacy. In addition, it is a key element of educator's empowerment for changes in the classroom. It is where educators are able to project their belief that they can make a different in the lives of students.

Teacher reflection.

It is considered a method that facilitates improvement in performance Osterman and Kottkamp (2004). Phan (2009) indicated that reflective thinking practice and achievement goals are important factors contributing to the prediction of students' academic success. York-Barr et

al. (2006) also described the reflective educator as: a person who stays on focused on education's main purpose, which is student learning and development, a person who assumes responsibility for his/her own learning, a person who demonstrates awareness of self and others, and a person developing the thinking skill for effective inquiry.

Another item of importance to effective teaching is for the author to have confidence in his ability to promote student learning, which was related to student achievement in a RAND corporation study (Hawkins, 2009). Case in point, it is the moment when the students are gone for the day, and the author would review the day's teaching lessons and activities, and reflect by asking some of the following questions: "How did I do today in my teaching?" "Can I improve my teaching and how can I improve?"

Conclusion

School violence is on the increase and has the community, school, students, and teachers on edge. However, teachers have the vital role in decreasing the rate of student violence by implementing several educational tools at their disposal. By understanding the problem, the teachers are able to select and apply the appropriate teaching strategies that would foster an effective learning environment, where students would eventually increase their academic performance. In addition, implementing these concepts would also improve teachers' teaching practices.

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