

What Every Administrator Needs to Know About:

Behavior Management

A.K.A. Blood, Sweat, and Tiers

Jim Teagarden, Assistant Professor of Special Education, Kansas State University

Jim Armendariz, Building Principal, Ogden Elementary School

Felicity Balluch, Special Education Teacher, Ogden Elementary School

Celeste Coleman, Adaptive Learning Center Teacher, Salina South Middle School

Overview

“The to teach without the skill to manage behavior within the classroom is like attempting to hit a home run without first bringing the bat to the plate.” – As shared by a retiring superintendent of schools at his retirement reception. This thought well recognizes that the best lesson plan can be derailed by failure to insure the behavioral needs of the students are met during the instructional planning. Many times this failure results in punitive or negative attempts to gain control. Often this results in teachers who incorrectly apply management strategies that result in mixed or negative results. Obviously this causes frustration on the part of the teachers engaged in such situations. In all too many cases this cycle of frustration and continued failure may result in increasingly counter productive measures that result in increased job dissatisfaction on the part of the teacher and an increased need for administrator intervention.

Teachers who lack behavior management skills increase the workload of the administrator in that parents, students, and teachers are all keenly aware of the fact that the educational experience is not what it could, or should, be. These demands can take

the form of unhappy parents, low achievement scores, loss of instructional time, increased office disciplinary referrals, and a decline in the general morale within the school setting. This cycle can rob the building administrator of the most valuable resource, i.e. time. Time spent in dealing with disgruntled parents is time lost from mentoring struggling teachers on instructional planning. Time spent on office disciplinary referrals is time lost from planning building wide behavioral expectations. Time spent on interviewing for a replacement of a disenchanted teacher is time lost on supporting staff in meeting the daily challenges of the teaching profession,

The purpose of this workshop is to provide administrators with the information and strategies that have been utilized in the Ogden Experience to successfully meet many of these challenges in a successful fashion. This we have titled *Blood, Sweat, and Tiers*. These correspond to a three level approach in addressing the behavioral management needs of students. They are:

1. Blood: A foundation that recognizes that students and staff are diverse with many personal differences. These factors must be considered and blended into a common school atmosphere with shared behavioral expectations if the educational process is to be successful.
2. Sweat: An attitude that recognizes that behavioral expectations are deserving of instruction rather than assuming students who present a behavioral challenge are acting with willful malice when in fact the skill may not be one that they have mastered. This is meaningful work for both teachers and students.

3. Tiers: Is the application of these principles to provide a positive support structure that recognizes both the individual needs of the students and yet balances these needs to provide a school wide set of common expectations.

Like the song *Spinning Wheel by Blood, Sweat, and Tears*, the experiences of the Ogden staff in meeting the diverse needs of a group of students are ever changing and yet connected by the axle and spokes that provide the structure to an every changing clientele. As the song says, “what goes up must come down”, and guiding principle is that although certain challenges may change the basic remain to a large degree unchanged.

Blood

Foundation

The foundation of any successful behavior management program begins with some basic concepts that influence and drive the efforts to address these issues. One of these is the idea that discipline is not the same as punishment but rather an expected and positive set of behavioral expectations that support the educational experience. The prevention of behavioral problems is always preferred to the need for reactive intervention techniques. A strong foundation in prevention begins with the teachers’ and principal’s attitude. This attitude is reflected in the environmental arrangement and the message this conveys to students. A “safe spot” within the classroom allow the students to see that behavioral expectations are part of a larger problem solving process and not a simple list of compliance demands. The environmental arrangement also conveys many of the behavioral expectations that certain activities are allowed and the type of activity will modify what the behavioral expectations will be operating. The attitude also

recognizes that although the teacher may desire the students to be self-reinforcing and intrinsically motivated many times other forms of incentives must be used to strengthen desired behaviors. One of the most powerful forms of incentive is the use of praise and recognition for appropriate behaviors especially for the student who is struggling with the use of these behaviors.

Another concept developed in this foundation phase is that social behaviors are a content area. They can be taught, practiced, and higher levels of mastery are possible. This opens the door to directly teaching behaviors in much the same manner as one would teacher any other content area. This might take the form of direct instruction, guided practice and application. Effective instruction, keeping students actively engaged, provides fewer opportunities for misbehavior. This applies not only in the teaching of social behaviors but all content areas. If the student identifies how a concept applies to them or how they can use a skill then the instruction has been effective. If the student leaves the instructional setting with the question, “Why do I need to know this?” then the instruction has been ineffective.

One of the most critical factors in the foundation phase of building an atmosphere of positive expectations is to recognize the importance of relationships in the social interaction of humans. If you think about the topics of discussion at the last family Thanksgiving dinner and compare those topics with the last round of drinks that you participated in at your favorite pub you get some idea of the power of relationships. My guess is unless the two events involved the same individuals and the same setting that many topics that you discussed and what was left unsaid have noteworthy differences. Although it isn't possible or advisable to recreate a “family” within a classroom, it is

critical to create an atmosphere in which the students view the teacher as a positive person in their lives. This sets a positive cycle in motion in which students when they view the teacher as a positive person who genuinely care tend to work harder and engage in behaviors that are viewed as positive by the teacher who in turn increases the supportive behaviors for the students in the classroom. If this can be duplicated throughout the building an environment that is positive, consistent, and compassionate greets the students.

Research supporting

The research into the school climate as a predictor of classroom discipline provides some very specific techniques but a caution is in order. Classroom discipline should not be viewed as a bag of tricks or a checklist of things to try but rather as a way of interacting that models the values that reflect ones philosophy in an everyday matter. Some of the specific findings that have been shown to have a positive impact on classroom behavior management include having the teacher plan the rules and procedures before the school year begins and then present them to the students during the first few days of school. The establishment of smooth, efficient classroom routines including beginning each class purposefully and quickly, having activities ready when the students arrive, and require materials have been shown to positively impact student behavior. In addition a periodic review of the routines also have a positive impact.

Sweat

Attitude

The attitude or mindset by which one addresses behavior management can impact the success of any efforts to improve the classroom or building climate. As with most

human endeavors in it rarely the case that all stakeholders will “buy in” to any plans or program. It is the ultimately the responsibility of the building principal to set the tone for the building and yet recognize that flexibility for teachers’ style and level of skill development is a ever present factor. Part of the responsibility of the building principal is model the value of all personnel. Most schools and classrooms face the issue of having many personnel that may lack experience or training. The principal must realize that by concentrating on too many strategies may lead to confusion and frustration on the part of the personnel and students alike. Without the training and experience many of these novices may feel that behavior management takes too much time and hold past indiscretions against the students. The principal’s role includes modeling and teaching that by establishing clear expectations and by teaching appropriate behaviors you in fact are increasing the quality and quantity of the educational experience. The key is that effective classroom discipline begins with the teacher.

Research supporting

Several themes have been identified in the research relating to the attitude of the teacher upon the effectiveness of effort to improve classroom discipline. First, it is commonly found that teachers who set clear standards and apply them fairly tend to establish classroom standards that are consistent with the building standards. These teachers also provide a written statement of their behavior standards to the students and directly teach the standards at the beginning of the year. These are further developed as clear and specific rules. The standards are typically developed with some form of genuine student input and practice and re-teaching are commonplace. Effective teachers apply these standards in a consistent, equitable manner that includes reinforcing positive

pro-social behaviors while stopping disruption quickly. These teachers also focus on the behavior and not on the history or personality of the student while they handle most disciplinary matters in the classroom.

To be effective behavior managers, teacher must recognize that the term discipline is somewhat like a sponge. It tends to absorb meanings from its nearness to people and places. For some it means the power to control, to others it means the power to teach. The principal's role is to support the teacher as they attempt to find the meaning for themselves and how this meets the needs of their students. This again can be an opportunity for the principal to model certain behaviors that if utilized by the teachers will have a positive impact upon the students' behaviors. These include communicating interest verbally and nonverbally, encouraging the development of responsibility and self-reliance, and share appropriate experiences with anecdotes that illustrate shared experiences.

Tiers

Application

The final stage in creating an atmosphere that supports improved discipline is the application of the concepts to existing classrooms and schools. The key aspect is to have a developed plan that illustrates what your expectations are and what personal limitations you may have. The critical importance of developing a plan is most apparent in crisis situations. During these "worse case" scenarios the cost of experimentation and thoughtful reflection can be quite high at this stage. By planning for these situations in advance, one can work the plan rather than having our emotions work us.

Part of this planning stage would include the establishment of rules, reinforcement, and consequences. These should be clear and concise which allows for teaching and modeling of the expected standards. The planning stage also allows for the teaching of the standards using a variety of teaching styles that include choices and adaptations to meet the students' needs.

As a building principal there are some specific actions that may impact the teachers' ability to support improved behavioral changes. The first is to modify a setting to prompt responsible behavior. This could mean adapting schedules or classes to impact the demands of the students. The second, removing any aversive aspect of exhibiting responsible behavior, requires the building principal to in fact be a building leader. The principal must have a comprehensive knowledge of the school ecosystem and impact anything that may cause responsible behavior to be viewed as aversive. Thirdly, the principal needs to implement procedures designed to encourage responsible behavior. These may include school wide programs such as a "student of the week" or more personalized programs such as a note from the principal to the student affirming an act of responsible behavior. The fourth thing a principal may do to impact positive behavioral change is to remove any positive aspects of exhibiting irresponsible behavior. This in fact may be the most difficult to implement since much of the time the reaction of the staff to irresponsible behavior is viewed as a positive to many students. Rethinking and planning for these situations may in fact be the best avenue of removing the positive aspects of irresponsible behavior. The fifth and final thing for a building principal to do that may impact behaviors is to implement corrective procedures. These should be proactive

and educationally sound rather than punitive measures to insure learning is the emphasis and not retribution.

The behavior of the staff greatly influences the behavior of the students. For this reason staff members need to gain understanding and control of their own feelings. One avenue to increase the likelihood of this to occur is to encourage the joint planning of teachers. This allows for talking and sharing between colleagues that fosters interdependency and responsibility by all staff members. This should also include a method for the teachers to gain skills in the art of actively listening to students. In short the best means to apply the skills in creating a successful, supportive learning environment is for each staff member to “walk the walk”.

Research supporting

Effective applications of the principles of a supportive educational setting have been identified as a set of specific teacher behaviors. These include defining excellence by an objective standard not by peer comparisons, relating incentives to specific achievements, and providing developmentally appropriate incentives.

Spinning Wheel

The metaphor of a spinning wheel provides a structure by which the school and the ever changing demands of the students and society at larger create an ever moving target. The hub of the wheel is the building principal that provides the center point around which the spokes of the wheel, school staff, rotate in an attempt to meet the needs of the public and the students. The spokes deserve the support and structure provided by the hub if they are to be successful. The building principal can provide this support by

recognizing it is a three-phase process. The foundation sets in place the structure upon which all decisions are based. The attitude determines the climate of the school building and the likelihood of success. The application is the final stage that supports students as they seek long-term behavior changes rather than short-term fixes.

Resources

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