

Competence Enhancement Behavior Management

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ABSTRACT: Competence Enhancement Behavior Management is presented as a framework for supporting students with challenging behaviors in general education classrooms. This approach emphasizes classroom management and discipline strategies that (a) help to build positive relations with students, (b) communicate to students that they are important, and (c) teach appropriate behaviors as alternatives to problematic ones.

KEY WORDS: behavior management, school discipline, school adjustment

Finding strategies to effectively address challenging behaviors (i.e., aggressive, disruptive, defiant) is one of the greatest concerns of teachers (Van Acker & Wehby, 2000). Studies have shown that aggressive students in first grade classrooms that are ineffectively managed tend to sustain behavior problems into middle school (Kellam, Rebok, Ialongo, & Mayer, 1994). Although positive approaches that teach and reinforce appropriate behaviors are often most effective (Sutherland, 2000), teachers tend to respond to students with challenging behaviors with strategies that reinforce and sustain the problem behavior (Van Acker, Grant, & Henry, 1996). However, there is mounting evidence that teachers can influence the classroom social climate through their behavior management skills and can directly affect students' behavioral adjustments.

To manage successful group processes and general classroom social dynamics, teachers often need collaborative support to develop comprehensive skills and strategies that can enhance children's social growth by promoting a behavioral context that supports prosocial patterns (Cartledge & Loe, 2001; Lo, Loe, & Cartledge, 2002; Lonczak, Abbott, Hawkins, Kosterman, & Catalano, 2002; Walker, Colvin, & Ramsey, 1995). Recent work suggests that school psychologists and counselors represent an excellent resource to promote the social and emotional needs of students (Ross, Powell, & Elias, 2002). School-wide behavior management programs have proven effective in reducing problem behavior including interpersonal problems and conflict (Bear, 1998; Lewis, Sugai, & Colvin, 1998; Nelson, 1996).

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In the following discussion, we offer a framework that can be used by behavioral consultants to support general education teachers in the development of positive approaches to classroom management and discipline. We developed this framework, the Competence Enhancement Behavior Management (CEBM) model, from well-established ecological, behavioral, and psychoeducational best practices for preventing and managing conflict and aggression in the classroom (e.g., Algozzine & Kay, 2002; Hobbs, 1982; Johns & Carr, 1995; Lewis et al., 1998; Long & Morse, 1996; Nelson, 1996). Preliminary work suggests that this approach is linked to productive classroom engagement, supportive adult–student relationships, and enhanced social contact and prosocial support for at-risk youth (Caddwallader et al., 2002). Compared with at-risk students in a control school, boys who showed low competence behavioral profiles in the CEBM-intervention condition evidenced increased social contact and were more likely to be embedded in positive peer groups at a 1-month postintervention evaluation. A second pilot study of the CEBM component involved 3-month postintervention follow-ups in five 4th and 5th grade classrooms. Classroom observations revealed that teachers exhibited more consistency and effectiveness in stating and enforcing behavioral expectations, provided constructive consequences to teach alternative behaviors, and used real life social situations as opportunities to teach and reinforce prosocial skills. In turn, students were more academically and socially engaged and less likely to be involved in disruptive and aggressive behavior.

The CEBM framework is presented in five sections. “Aims and Viewpoints” discusses teachers’ general philosophy and thinking about behavior management and discipline. “General Management Strategies” provides an overview of intervention techniques that are essential for effective classroom management. “Communicating With Students” summarizes strategies to build supportive relationships with students with challenging behaviors. “Social Networks and Peer Groups” describe how the social context contributes to students’ behavior and how information about classroom social

dynamics can be used to positively affect challenging behavior. “Constructive Consequences” outlines how teachers can approach discipline in a way that reinforces appropriate behaviors and builds positive relations with students.

Aims and Viewpoints

Students with challenging behavior tend to be skilled at getting “under the skin” of adults. Most teachers can attest that when such students are angry, bored, or feeling challenged, they may respond in ways that undermine the teacher’s authority and disrupt the class (Long & Morse, 1996). A natural tendency is to respond to such behavior by “teaching the student a lesson” (i.e., providing harsh consequences) or “showing the class who is in charge” (Van Acker et al., 1996). Although it is understandable that challenging behavior can be offensive to teachers, it is necessary to keep any personal feelings in check. In the long run, efforts to punish the students are likely to escalate the problem and lead to continuing conflict between students and teachers. From the CEBM perspective, teachers should view behavior management and discipline as an opportunity to develop better relationships with students and to teach or reinforce alternative behaviors that will produce most positive outcomes.

The cornerstone of this framework is that teachers approach challenging situations with optimistic, caring, and positive attitudes. To be more specific, teachers need to communicate to students that they are important, that adults are there to support them, and that adults will work with them until they learn what they need to be successful. This does not mean that teachers should ignore the challenging behavior of their students. On the contrary, teachers should provide appropriate, consistent, and meaningful consequences in a positive manner that say “adults aren’t going to let you engage in this behavior because we care and because you are worth the time that it takes to teach you how to do it right.”

General Classroom Management Strategies

There are a host of management strategies that can help teachers promote appropriate classroom behavior (e.g.,

Algozzine & Kay, 2002; Johns & Carr, 1995; Walker et al., 1995). The aim here is not to provide an exhaustive list, but to outline those techniques that we believe are critical for creating contexts that foster positive and productive behavior from youths who tend to be challenging to teachers. An important component in the application of each of these strategies is that they become part of the classroom routine and are used in a consistent and predictable manner.

Greeting Students

As students enter the class, teachers should routinely greet each youngster to instill a feeling of being welcomed and provide them clear expectations for what they can do before class officially starts. The actual routines will vary greatly depending on the age and characteristics of students as well as the nature of the class (i.e., physical education vs. science). Also, the personal characteristics of students and teacher play a role here. It is important for teachers to develop a routine that best fits their personalities and that creates a climate that helps everyone feel comfortable and prepared to be productively engaged.

Starting Class

Youths with challenging behaviors often have attention problems or difficulties getting organized. At the beginning of the day, it is critical to have routines that let students know what will be happening that day (i.e., reviewing the schedule). Likewise, it is necessary to have routines at the beginning of each class that include reviews of previous work, an overview of the present work and assignments, and any specific behavioral expectations that are necessary for doing the work. In addition, although it is necessary to vary instructional presentation to the particular content or assignment, it is helpful to use an approach and manner that is predictable from one day to the next. Although students with challenging behavior can tolerate well-structured change, they tend to have difficulty adapting to frequent unexpected and novel situations.

Clear Behavioral Expectations

Students with challenging behavior need to know exactly what is expected of

them and they need to be reminded frequently (Nelson, Martella, & Galand, 1998). Therefore, it is helpful to start each class by stating both behavioral and instructional expectations. The expectations should be concise and worded in a positive way that makes it clear to students how they should behave. Depending on the age and characteristics of the class, it may be helpful to have individual students state the expectations. General behavioral expectations should be consistent from one day to the next and any special expectations for a particular task should be made explicit and repeated until it is clear that everyone understands. When a particular student is not meeting expectations, it is helpful for the teacher to use a group-level redirection by simply restating the expectation and then recognizing students who are modeling the appropriate behavior. In addition to general expectations for classroom behavior, it is also helpful to have specific routines reflected by a limited number of behavioral expectations and routines for particular activities, such as class transitions, lunchroom behavior, and playground behavior. For example, students can be taught to transition successfully from one activity to another by giving prior notice that a change will take place, by giving time to wrap up the current activity, and by using visual cues, such as hand signals or lights to indicate transition.

Adapting Instruction for Engagement and Success

When students with challenging behavior understand instruction and find it engaging, they are less likely to have problems. It is necessary to be keenly aware of such students' academic strengths and weaknesses and to structure instruction in ways that maximize the students' success. This should include identifying instructional content that builds from the students' interests and pacing instruction so that students can both keep up and stay interested. For example, with highly active first graders it may help to make every third or fourth question in a group exercise one that students can answer and to call on students at that frequency. This does not mean that there should be lowered expectations for such students, but it does mean that they should not be put on the cutting-

edge unless teachers have the time and resources to help them work through difficult assignments. For example, if a fourth grader has considerable difficulty in math, it may help to begin class by giving the student 10 minutes of drill on previously mastered work. While the student is working on this, the teacher can instruct the other students and get them started on their work. Once the class is working, the teacher can go back to the student and give individual instruction to help to increase familiarity with the new material.

Proximity Management

One way to manage behavior is to quietly move near a student or students who are not meeting expectations. Simple eye contact, perhaps providing a physical prompt, such as tapping the students' paper, and quietly standing near the student until he or she is meeting expectations are usually much more effective and less disruptive than verbal reprimands. If it seems necessary to speak, a soft whisper of "Can I help you?" is often enough to get students back on track. Also, it is often helpful to anticipate where a problem might occur during a particular activity and to move to that area as the activity begins. In addition, it is helpful to arrange the class so that students who are in the immediate vicinity of a student with challenging behavior are not provocative and are least likely to be pulled into a problem.

Group Contingencies

Peers are very influential. By using group contingencies, teachers can use the power of the peer group to help establish and reinforce appropriate behaviors and routines. Simple contingencies such as "we can't go to recess until all the work is put away and everyone is sitting quietly" can be highly effective. However, care should be taken to ensure that the contingency does not focus negative attention on a particular student. For example, if students have a high activity level and have never been able to stay in their seat at transition times it would be necessary to use other strategies such as proximity control to make sure they are sitting appropriately when the contingency is in effect. In some situations, students with challenging behavior may enjoy having

the power to thwart the desires or rewards of others. Group contingencies should not be used in such circumstances. Therefore, while this can be a very effective technique, it must be monitored and used carefully so that it does not provoke conflict among students.

Communicating With Students

Communicating with students involves much more than talking and listening. People's values and thoughts are communicated through their interactions. How teachers treat students in front of the class, present concerns to the class or to individual students, and work through a problem with a student send a message about how teachers think and feel about others. Effective and supportive communication is the cornerstone to building positive relationships with students with challenging behavior. When dealing with a problem situation, it is necessary to constantly monitor one's own behavior and to ask oneself "What messages are my actions sending to students and to the class?"

Tone of Voice

In general, it is best to use a firm but neutral tone of voice that is not provocative. However, it is also necessary to read the emotional needs of students and to provide a voice tone and affect to correspond with those needs. Speaking softly and calmly while progressively lowering one's own voice is usually the most effective way to deescalate a problem situation. Other times it may be best not to speak at all until students show signs of calming down. In some cases, a situation may require the display of other emotions including humor, empathy, or even anger. However, it is important that teachers keep their own feelings in check and purposefully display a specific emotion when events warrant it.

Group Level Redirection

When some students are not following directions, it is helpful to use group level redirection. This involves restating the expectation (i.e., "I want to remind the class that there should be no talking right now"). In many cases, it helps to give behavior-specific praise to students who are meeting the expectation (i.e., "I like the way Michael, Quinton, and Kimberly are

sitting quietly”) and to also recognize students as they perform the desired behavior (i.e., “Candice is meeting expectations”). Once everyone stops talking, the whole class should be praised (i.e., “I really like the way everyone stopped talking and followed my directions”). This approach only brings attention to appropriate behavior and communicates to students exactly what behavior is expected. In some cases, this strategy may become provocative if the same students are repeatedly called on for positive behavior. Therefore, it should be used carefully with an eye on how students are responding to it. However, in most circumstances, it is highly effective.

Individual Redirection

Frequent public redirection of specific individuals may reinforce the view that they are problem students. Such identities are likely to be self-fulfilling and may intensify students’ challenging behaviors. In addition, frequent public redirection can be provocative and may challenge students to act out. Therefore, it is helpful to develop less obvious forms of individual redirection, such as eye contact, stopping by students’ desks and tapping on their work, or whispering a gentle reminder to students. The critical point here is that the redirection is presented in a friendly, nonchallenging manner that fosters a positive response.

Private Conferences

Students with challenging behavior have a tendency to have public show-downs with adults. Such situations should be avoided and routines should be established for having private discussions to work through problems with students. To do this, make it clear that these talks are not punishment and set them up in ways that others in the class do not view them in a negative way. It is helpful to have a familiar routine to direct the student on how to disengage from the situation and to move to an area where a private conversation can take place. Structure the talks so that they will end on a positive note and reinforce the likelihood that students will follow this routine in the future.

Listening and Understanding

Students with challenging behavior often feel that no one is interested in their

side of the story. Also, many problems tend to involve much more than what is immediately obvious. It is helpful to develop an individualized routine for talking through a problem when dealing with students with challenging behavior. This should involve both the student and the adult presenting their views of the difficulty. Two aims should guide such talks. First, the adult should carefully listen and ask questions that generate new insight into the students’ views and that help to identify other factors (e.g., problems at home, dispute with peers) that may be contributing to the problem. Second, teachers should help students to develop a sense that adults care about their needs. The critical issue here is that students develop a trusting relationship with teachers and feel that teacher can help them work through a problem.

The Why of Behavior Management

Students with challenging behavior tend to view behavior intervention in a negative manner. This can get in the way of helping them to learn positive alternatives. Often times, they may view the reason for intervention as teachers do not like them, teachers are mad at them, or teachers do not care about them. When working through a problem with students, it is often necessary to directly state why you are concerned about the behavior, why it is important for students to learn and use alternative ways, and what you hope to achieve with the intervention. It is also helpful to get students’ input about other possible ways of intervening and to give them the opportunity to take ownership in the behavior change process. The critical point here is that students view the intervention as meaningful and feel that it is intended to help promote their future successes.

Social Networks and Peer Groups

Classrooms and schools should be viewed as communities. When students come together in a class or grade, informal social structures emerge as students form distinct peer groups. Social dynamics (i.e., the composition of peer groups, the characteristics of students who are socially influential, inter- and intragroup

relationships) may have a strong positive or negative influence on youths with challenging behavior.

Social Dynamics

Social structures formed in classrooms and schools tend to be hierarchical as some groups and students have higher status than do others (Farmer, 2000). Hanging out with the right or wrong peers can greatly affect students’ status and improving and protecting their position in the social structure is a common concern for many youths. Therefore, conflict and aggression can build as individuals and groups jockey for power within the social structure. Also, popular and conventional peers that are often viewed as good students by teachers may use social aggression (i.e., covert and concealed tactics such as gossiping, starting rumors, triangulating friendships) to manipulate others. Such tactics, can be highly provocative for youths with challenging behavior. Several techniques can be used to promote positive classroom communities (Cartledge & Loe, 2001; Farmer, 2000; Lo et al., 2002):

1. Monitor classroom social dynamics (i.e., become aware of the social hierarchy and the strategies that students use to preserve the boundaries of their peer groups, including bullying and social aggression).
2. Develop and enforce meaningful social consequences for social aggression and bullying (e.g., students must have an adult escort during hall transitions, student must have lunch at an adult-monitored table) and apply these consequences in ways that foster positive alternative behaviors.
3. Create a climate that downplays social status by promoting activities that positively reinforce students’ acceptance and tolerance of each other.
4. Provide positive social consequences (e.g., free time, special activities) for exemplary displays of favorable inter- and intragroup relationships.
5. Identify peer groups that routinely engage in activities (e.g., teasing, bullying, social aggression) that promote interpersonal conflict. An adult “mentor” (i.e., teacher, administrator, counselor) should be assigned to each prob-

lematic group and should work to develop a positive rapport with the group. Mentors should ask for frequent updates from their group and identify ways to support the group's productive involvement in positive school activities.

Peer Group Influences and Social Roles

Youth form peer groups with others who are like them. Students who associate with each other tend to have one or more similar social characteristics (i.e., level of aggression, popularity, academic ability, and athletic ability). Students may also associate with peers who complement their behavior (e.g., followers with leaders). For example, popular aggressive boys may associate with nonaggressive popular peers. These aggressive boys may gain social power by working as "enforcers" who help to maintain the social dominance of their associates by taunting, teasing, and picking on classmates with lower status. Other aggressive boys may be less popular and associate with unpopular peers whom they can dominate and bully. However, unpopular aggressive youths are often themselves victims of bullying. Teachers should develop strategies to help students with problem behavior establish peer associations and social roles that support positive behavior. A variety of strategies can help to foster positive social relationships for youths with challenging behavior (Farmer, 2000):

1. Provide social skills training for youths with challenging behaviors that target specific deficits and build new competencies.
2. Help students develop affiliations with peers who are supportive of positive social behavior and who reinforce their newly acquired skills.
3. Structure the social opportunities of leaders of antisocial groups so that their leadership role is contingent on their support of prosocial behavior from other group members. For example, do not allow students to be team captains if they support the bullying of others.
4. Develop group-level contingencies for prosocial behavior and enlist the support of group leaders by providing them with suggestions for how the group can

meet expectations. For example, give behavior-specific directions on how the group can earn the opportunity for a preferred activity during free time.

5. Anticipate and avoid placing students who are frequently bullied in situations that promote their being picked on by peers.
6. Provide students who are frequently picked on with opportunities that highlight their social strengths and that minimize their social liabilities.

Constructive Consequences

When students behave in inappropriate ways, it is necessary to have consequences that reduce the likelihood that the problem behavior will recur. It can be tempting to use highly aversive consequences that satisfy one's own need for retribution. However, harsh consequences can have negative effects, such as escalating the problem and provoking the student to get back at the teacher or peers. Also, such approaches create a context that is not very conducive to teaching students new skills or reinforcing positive alternative behaviors. It is helpful to identify consequences that students would prefer to avoid but that can nonetheless be presented in positive and meaningful ways that communicate to students that "I care enough to take the time to teach you things that are important for you to learn in life." The critical point here is that consequences are structured in such a way that students come to understand that it is better to go ahead and adopt an appropriate behavior than it is to spend their own personal time practicing it.

Positive Practice

Positive practice involves the practice of an appropriate behavior as a consequence of an inappropriate one. With this technique, when students inappropriately perform a behavior that they have previously mastered, the teacher directs the student to try it again until it is done correctly. After the appropriate behavior is performed, students should be asked to repeat it to help ensure that it will be done correctly in the future. For example, when students are running in the hall, the teacher would ask them to go back and walk. When students demonstrate the appropriate behavior the teacher should

say "Yes, that's the correct way to do it, now let's go back one more time so that you'll be sure to remember how to do it next time." It is important to use a firm but pleasant voice and to communicate through one's actions that the purpose behind this is to help students learn how to perform the correct behavior.

Premacked Schedule

Premacked schedules involve following a less desired activity with a highly desired one and making the desired activity contingent on the successful completion of the less desired one. For example, if math is a particularly difficult period for students, it may help to concentrate the instructional activities into 40 minutes. The last 10 minutes of class may be used as free time to reinforce diligent work. When students get off task, the teacher should remind them that they are using up their time. When correctly structured and applied, such an approach can be very effective at keeping a difficult class on track. In addition, it is helpful to sporadically "reward" the class with extra free time to give them a sense that hard work pays off (it is important to structure free-time activities so they do not become a problem). The secret to an effective premacked schedule is that the teacher structures it so that it will be successful.

Practice Class

The application of consequences for problem behavior should be viewed as an opportunity to teach and reinforce new competencies. For example, if students have a short temper and are prone to getting into fights, a consequence for fighting should include anger-management training. Building from this perspective, the use of premacked schedules, and the concept of positive practice, we have developed practice class as an alternative to in-school suspension. For students with chronic behavior problems (e.g., being tardy, refusing to follow directions, coming unprepared for class), it is helpful to have them attend practice class as a consequence of the behavior. Consistent with a premacked framework, the class should occur at a time when it is interfering with another desirable activity (e.g., free time, after school, activity period) and if possible, it should be conducted by

the teacher with whom students are having the difficulty. During this class, students should learn or practice the skills that are necessary to perform the appropriate behavior. It is critical that this approach is not used in an arbitrary fashion or is presented in a way that communicates to students that it is busy work. Instead, the teacher and any others involved (i.e., principal, parent) should communicate to students that adults think it is important to learn the appropriate behavior and that they will continue to help students practice it until they do it correctly. When students begin to show difficulties performing the appropriate behavior in the classroom, they can be reminded of practice class. This should not be presented as a threat but as a reminder that adults will be there to help them practice the behavior if they need it.

Using and Evaluating the CEBM Framework

Through our consulting and research activities, we have found that general education teachers in both primary and secondary settings can effectively use the strategies we have described. We typically teach specific component areas in an inservice workshop format and then meet with small teams (often organized around grade level or shared students) over several weeks to provide extensive small group consulting to train key skills and strategies. In addition, we often provide one-to-one consulting to help teachers develop strategies to address a specific problem or concern.

Teachers often have a tendency to identify one or two strategies that work and then apply those strategies to all situations. Although this is understandable, we strongly discourage it. Teachers should clearly adapt the strategies described above to fit with their specific needs and

skills. However, each of the five components of the CEBM framework should be included in teachers' classroom-management repertoires because the different components support and affect each other. Good behavior management and behavior change is a growth process, and it is unlikely that teachers will see immediate and sustainable results. In fact, things can often get worse before they get better. Nonetheless, when applied effectively, this approach should slowly yield positive gains not only in students' behaviors but also in their relationships and their attitudes and beliefs. Ultimately, the success of this approach should not only be measured in the absence of behavior problems but also in development of new competencies both in teachers and in students with challenging behaviors.

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