Centennial School: Deliberately Proactive

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Centennial School: Deliberately Proactive

Centennial School provided an epitomized display of the proactive and well-planned strategies key to proper classroom management. Six students in a forth to sixth grade setting were observed in a school for children with emotional-behavioral disorders (EBD) and/or autism spectrum disorders (ASD). The class consisted of two female and four male students with EBD, none of which were English Language Learners or from notably diverse backgrounds. The children were supported by at least two teachers at all times: one teacher acting as the main instructor and a second, alternating instructor focusing on individualized instruction or special topic teaching. Both teachers were well versed in a variety of classroom management strategies and used applied behavior analysis techniques such as consequence altering for reinforcement or punishment to lead students to self-manage their behavior and learning. Five very notable classroom management strategies were evidently used throughout the school day as follow: (1) school-wide rules and expectations, (2) a token reinforcement economy, (3) classroom seating layouts, (4) explicitly taught social skills, and (5) modeling. With this varied toolkit, teachers and students were proactively led to an environment that encouraged demeanor and facilitated an effortless control of learning and behavior.

Using a exemplary applications of school-wide positive behavior supports (PBS), Centennial School had clear, concise rules and expectations posted and taught throughout the school. In line with the research of Sugai, Horner, & Gresham (2002), the school used only five rules which were short and clearly stated as follow: (1) Be There, Be Ready, (2) Be Responsible, (3) Be Respectful, (4) Keep Hands and Feed to Self, and (5) Follow Directions. Additionally, expectations appropriate for that environment corresponding to each rule were presented in the style of Horner and Sugai's (2008) expectation matrix and posted on walls throughout the building and referred to often. For instance, in the classroom the expectations poster was referred to for proper adherence to the rules as applied to the classroom setting and each expectation for following the rule was explained in relation to the current subject. Similarly, in the gymnasium the poster there was referred by the physical education instructor and each expectation reviewed with specific application to basketball drill activities. Undoubtedly, the rules and expectations were clear and well taught but a better application is possible.

When children were in the hallways, rules and expectations were similarly posted as appropriate but teachers never reviewed hallway expectations. Similarly, teachers did not consistently review rule applications in specialty rooms such as the library and computer laboratory although posters were present. Nelson, Martella and Galand (1998) suggest that without consistency, behavior challenges are not reduced. Teachers must regularly attended to the expectations and teach them in all environments in order to ensure optimal results in using the expectation matrix technique. Additionally, teachers could incorporate modeling of both inappropriate and appropriate behaviors to relate each to all students. In Boushey and Moser's *The Daily Five* (2006), the authors explain that by modeling appropriate behaviors students get practice on how to perform in the desired manner. Similarly, by allowing problem students to perform both proper and unacceptable applications of the expectations, these students are able to get the attention they desire from the unwanted behaviors and prove to themselves that they are capable of acting in the preferred manner. Clearly, the rules and expectations at Centennial are presented and used effectively but could benefit from enhancements in practice.

Conversely, the used of token economics at Centennial School is optimal and leaves little room for improvement despite the controversy surrounding the appropriateness of the strategy's use (Maggin,, Chafouleas, Goddard & Johnson, 2011). In the classes observed, two token economy-type systems were in use. First, students carried a point sheet used to "check out" of classes where they could earn zero, one or two points on a variety of behavioral elements during each subject. Students received unambiguous feedback from teachers about what they did or did not do to earn their points. At the end of the day, point sheets were tallied and students were awarded those points into a banking system. These points could later be used to "purchase" items from the school such as fast food meals, extra copies of lost homework assignments and items from the school store. Students always worked hard to achieve maximum points and showed external signs of disappointment when full points were not achieved; however, teachers never led students to believe they were losing points but rather that they just were not able to earn all possible points during that period of time. When students were outwardly upset by their points, teachers used the opportunity to give student a chance to reflect on how they could earn full points if the situation arose again. This allowed students to make better choices in future situations.

The second token economy used were tickets that students could use for raffles at school. Tickets were rewarded at the end of the AM and PM portions of the school day to students who showed exceptional self-management skills. Tickets could also be rewarded for especially good behaviors such as helping teachers and other students when it was not requested but needed; however, these tickets were rare. Students again were told specifically why they received tickets. The tickets seemed even more reinforcing than the points because they were only rewarded for optimal behaviors and were rewarded on a variable reinforcement schedule. Students knew they had a chance to win a big reward with the tickets but also understood that the tickets could go without a tangible reward. Nonetheless, any student whom received a ticket showed extreme pride in his or herself. Both token economy systems seemed to be put into place flawlessly and led to no behavior-for-token attitudes. The systems can be easily applied to real life by the need for appropriate behaviors in the workplace to achieve salaries, as well as bonuses for exception behaviors. When considering token economics, Centennial School provides the epitome of proper implementation.

Classroom seating layout was thoughtfully organized to facility simple behavior learning and behavior modification. Desks were staggered in two rows where all students had a clear view of the whiteboard, plenty of personal space and in a way where the teacher could easily walk between the desks to answer questions or use proximity control. There was also a semi-circle table at the back of the room facing a SmartBoard® where all students could sit for group activities. The teachers' desks were on the side of the room facing in towards the class and directly across from the door to allow for constant supervision of students, and students' personal belongings were kept against the opposite wall where everyone in the class could monitor them. All supplies were easily accessible to both students and teachers and posted behavior expectations were always in the students' sight. With unmistakable classroom layout planning, teachers at Centennial achieved a unparalleled learning environment. The only element which could be improved was somewhat poor lighting in the corners and rear of the classroom that seemed a facility issue rather than something the teacher could control.

A very important aspect of classroom management, explicitly taught social skills, appeared an important aspect of all teaching as well as a specific subject at Centennial School. Constant teaching of social skills included in-class lunches and verbal prompting from teachers using phrases such as, "I'm looking for students to follow my direction." and "Are you frustrated? If you would like help please raise your hand; if no, please take some time." Students were taught how to use anger management techniques such as taking time, or putting one's head down to relax and then refocus, in school and then taught through prompting when to use the behaviors. Likewise during lunch, students were monitored by teachers for appropriate lunch conversations and use of proper interpersonal skills. Student often had to use anger management strategies to cope with other students' actions during lunch. These anger management techniques were first taught during the students' social skills classes.

The social skills class combined all students in order to help students practice being in a big group, so that they might transition back to public school. One student explained that by being in the large group, she might not always get called on when she raised her hand and that she was learning how to remain composed when she was not called on right away. The class began with five to ten minutes of teacher-facilitated socializing among the students. Students were given topic to converse with other students about in the style of icebreakers, and asked to talk to a variety of students in order to generalize these socialization skills. Following this practice, students learned about specific social skills such as anger management techniques and coping strategies. While observing, students learned how to deal with disappointment properly as well as how to come back from an inappropriate response to a failure. Although, social skills were explicitly taught, teachers did not use the best methods for explicit instruction. Students watched a lot of movies modeling appropriate social skills and strategy use rather than practicing the approaches themselves. Teachers did not take time for students to fully discuss content of the movies or how they were currently using anger management strategies at home and in school. Time was wasted with videos and crafts instead of actively using the newly-taught social skills despite research showing that active engagement is most effective (Simonsen, Fairbanks, Briesch, Myers, & Sugai, 2008). For the most efficient instruction, active engagement in explicit social skills instruction absolutely needs a drastic increase at Centennial School.

The final outstanding classroom management technique observed at Centennial School was a thorough use of modeling by both teachers and students. Teachers identified modeling in students with praise such as, "I like how Johnny is being ready with his textbook out, sitting calmly and facing forward." This praise not only encouraged the behavior in the target student but led other children to attend to Johnny and follow his lead. Teachers modeled appropriate behaviors throughout the day by following expectations themselves and showing demeanor. They made eye contact when talking and said please and thank you. Students always seemed to notice these exemplary interactions, copied and reciprocated them. Even under extreme circumstances, students watched teachers for model behavior.

One notable situation highlighting modeling during observation at the school was when one student (hereafter referred to as Sally) was off task and attempting to be disruptive. While Sally was tapping on items, walking around the classroom and barricading the door with chairs, the teachers never gave Sally any extra attention. Teachers took time to specifically praise students for proper behaviors more often, but never even looked at Sally. It was clear that Sally was upset by both the lack of attention and all other students' appropriate behavior. The whole class followed the teacher's lead and completely ignoring Sally and her disruptions. Only after Sally was suspended for the remainder of the school day by administrators, did the teachers even mention her off task disruptions among themselves. Students never mentioned Sally's behaviors and continued their day with appropriate and ideal behaviors.

Clearly, teachers and staff at Centennial School work vigorously to use research-based strategies to educate their students in a manner that facilitates a well-managed classroom. The school provides a clear message that strategies must be researched, planned and thoughtfully implemented for an effective behavior management system in the classroom. Centennial School uses a variety of methods to provide structure and organization to each and every classroom while collecting data via point sheets and other means to monitor the success of each application. Plainly, the school is the archetype of classroom management strategy implementation despite areas for possible improvement. All methods are deliberate, proactive and monitored which is the key to the school's triumph over disciplinary, reactive behavior modifications. Teachers, as the future leaders and planners for all educational establishments, must take note of Centennial School and implement strategies following their leads for success.

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