

Developing An Inviting Classroom Climate Through A Comprehensive Behavior-Management Plan

Tommie R. Radd

The University of Nebraska at Omaha

A concern exists that behavior-management practices often disinvite the student and unintentionally sabotage efforts to support the development of the whole student. This paper discusses a plan for creating an inviting classroom climate through a positive, comprehensive behavior-management plan. The characteristics of an inviting classroom climate and a positive behavior-management plan are given. The framework of a positive behavior-management plan is explained. The relationship between an inviting classroom climate and a comprehensive behavior-management plan is discussed and supported.

With the growing number of documented at-risk youth (McWhirter, McWhirter, McWhirter, & McWhirter. 1993), a systematic approach is needed to invite students to learn and stay in school. We need to recognize and apply proven processes so that intentionally positive invitations occur for all students. Developmental guidance and counseling programs (Gysbers & Henderson, 1994; Myrick, 1993) have contributed to a greater focus on the development of the whole student. A concern exists that behavior-management practices often disinvite the student and unintentionally sabotage efforts to support the development of the whole student. This paper discusses a plan for an inviting classroom

climate and behavior management that can invite all students to learn and develop their potential.

Definitions

An inviting-classroom climate and school is one "where people enjoy teaching and learning and where policies, programs, and processes contribute to this joy. Student and teacher connected-ness and fulfillment not only lead to academic achievement, but are also legitimate goals in and of themselves." (Purkey & Novak, 1996, p.120) Schools and classrooms are viewed as communities and families rather than organizations.

A comprehensive behavior-management plan establishes the steps and processes that allow behavior to become a part of the learning process for both students and staff members. Every behavior that occurs in the classroom and school is used to teach students and staff members improved ways of interacting and communicating. A comprehensive-behavior plan provides the framework for healthy interactions in which behavioral challenges become opportunities for greater understanding and growth.

Student and teacher connectedness is developed by the quality of day-to-day interactions. It is critical that there is congruence between "what we say" to students and "what we do" with students, if trusting relationships can develop and support student learning. A comprehensive-behavior plan framework establishes the basis for this congruence between what we say and what we do so that students experience interactions which invite their involvement and growth. (Radd, 1996 a).

Characteristics of an Inviting Climate

The basic characteristics for an inviting climate are those essential for creating a trusting family where all are valued for their individual uniqueness, encouraged and supported to develop their potential, and all students are respected and included (Purkey & Novak, 1996). In this process the interactions of the teacher as the

primary facilitator are key for setting the tone. The positive invitations sent to students from the teacher have a direct effect on student learning and student feelings that the teacher "believes" that the students can succeed (Aspy & Roebuck, 1977; Brattesani, Weinstein, & Marshall, 1984; Ginott, 1972).

The characteristics of an inviting-classroom climate are:

1. respect for individual uniqueness~the classroom policy is that everyone is unique and has something to offer.
2. cooperative spirit-all students watch for opportunities to give a "special boost" to others when needed.
3. sense of belonging~the workings of the classroom are seen from an "our" instead of an "I" point of view.

4. pleasing habitat-every effort needs to be made to create an environment that is aesthetically pleasing and comfortable.
5. positive expectations-all expect positive things of them-selves and each other.
6. vital connections to society-students learn ways to interact and function in order to support individual and societal democratic development. (Purkey & Novak, 1996, pp.126-127)

Characteristics of a Comprehensive Behavior-Management Plan

A comprehensive behavior-management plan includes information for developing a positive, inclusive, cooperative, democratic classroom and school from kindergarten through grade 12. A positive democratic classroom can create a supportive climate which allows students to be honest and responsible for their actions (Edwards, 1993; Nelson, 1985). The resulting honesty and responsibility can develop a positive attitude needed for participation and learning. The framework of a comprehensive behavior management plan includes: 1. goals, competencies and outcomes, 2. the self-concept series and weave, 3. class meetings and rules,

4. decision making/problem solving, 5. problem ownership, 6. activities regarding behavior, 7. encouragement, 8. contracts, and 9. peer groups. (Radd, 1996 b & c).

The following explains the recommended components of the behavior-management plan. It is important to include these experiences if students and teachers are to become accountable for their behavior choices.

Goals, Competencies, and Outcomes

The first step for developing a positive behavior plan is to establish the goals, competencies and outcomes wanted. This involves evaluating the current classroom behavior plan and practices and making necessary modifications from the current behavior plan to include the desired behavior-management components that follow. Goals are global statements that indicate long-term desired outcomes. *Competencies* are desired proficiencies which are observable, measurable and developmental. These proficiencies are needed in order to reach the goal. *Outcomes* state what you will see when the competency is met and exhibited in life skills. These goals, competencies, and outcomes become the behavior-management strategic plan for students and staff (Radd, 1996 a).

The school team for the development of local goals, competencies, and outcomes and the timeline for the implementation of these goals may vary due to differences between school district needs and school personnel. It is recommended that the school counselor, school administrator, and representation of teachers, parents, and students are included when possible. The goals need to be based upon implementing the components of the comprehensive behavior-management plan.

The Self-Concept Series and Weave

The foundation of the behavior-management plan is to introduce and integrate the self-concept series and weave into the classroom and school building. The self-concept series, consisting of three steps, is taught to all students. These steps are as follows:

1. Each person is special and valuable because each is unique and different from any other person. (unconditional acceptance)

2. Because each person is special and unique, each has a responsibility to help and not hurt oneself or others. A person shows if one is remembering that each is important by the way he/she chooses to act. If the person chooses to hurt oneself or others, he/she is forgetting that he/she is special. Likewise, if a person chooses to help oneself or others, one is remembering that he/she is special. When a person helps oneself, one is also helping other people through demonstration and positive outcomes.

3. Each person is responsible to watch one's actions to determine if he/she is remembering the *truth* that each is special. Each person is "with" oneself at all times and is accountable to remember to treat oneself as an important person.

The self-concept series is taught and integrated for *all* students. After the self-concept series is introduced to students, the three steps are elicited from students to determine their level of understanding. The greater the number of adults and students who use, understand, and believe this self-concept process, the greater the opportunities for students to relate the information and experience into their knowledge base and life-skill understanding of self-concept.

The self-concept series is the base of the self-concept series weave. The concepts are taught, reviewed, connected and woven throughout each day-to-day experience that relates to the life experiences of students. (Thompson & Rudolph, 1996; Radd, 1996a)

The self-concept series and weave are the base of the behavior-management plan and build up students by separating student worth from their behavior choices. As a result, this positive dialogue regarding their behavior choices allows students the opportunity to be responsible for their choices and learn from the experience. These interactions with students support the self-concept development of students in all domains including learning (Purkey, 1970; Briggs, 1970).

Class Meetings and the Formulation of Classroom Rules

Class meetings are recommended as an ongoing part of the classroom week. At the first class meeting the students and teachers can formulate the rules for the classroom. The class meetings and rule formulation put a democratic process of cooperation in motion that establishes behavior as a part of student responsibility and learning. (Dreikurs, Greenwald, & Pepper, 1971; Wolfgang & Glickman, 1986; Epanchin, Townsend & Stoddard, 1994; Nelson, 1985; Emmett, et al., 1996).

The Decision-Making/Problem-Solving Model

Teaching students the decision-making process and how to apply that process to problem solving is important. Students can learn helpful versus hurtful behavior. use personal power and take responsibility for their behavior choices through the daily application of decision-making/problem-solving steps to situations that occur. It is helpful if the staff facilitates this process by using decision-making/problem-solving worksheets, that include decision-making steps which are developmentally appropriate, with students as behavior opportunities occur. A student or a group of students can complete the age-appropriate worksheet and develop a plan for helpful choices. (Fields & Boesser, 1994; Dreikurs, et al., 1971; Wolfgang & Glickman, 1986; Nelson, 1985).

Problem Ownership

Understanding problem ownership assists students in being accountable for handling problems which are a part of their learning opportunities. Classroom teachers, counselors, and other facilitators support the development of student confidence and self-concept by insisting that students solve their own issues and own their own problems (Wolfgang & Glickman, 1986; Fields & Boesser, 1994; Nelson, 1985).

Activities

It is important to incorporate activity experiences that teach students about behavior, especially the goals of misbehavior. Activities about the goals of misbehavior: attention-seeking, power, revenge, inadequacy, (Dreikurs, et al., 1971) are very important to include as different mistaken behavior goals of the classroom group may become clear. These activities assist students in greater understanding of underlying behavior motivation. This awareness can result in the class determining helpful ways of reaching what they want instead of hurtful ways (Dreikurs, et al., 1971; Wolfgang & Glickman, 1986; Nelson, 1985).

Encouragement

Encouragement supports healthy self-concept development, cooperation and confidence while praise erodes self-concept development and confidence building. Incorporating encouragement, which focuses on the process and feelings of the student, instead of praise, which focuses on the product and feelings of the facilitator is recommended (Nelson, 1985; Fields & Boesser, 1994; Dreikurs, et al., 1971; Wolfgang & Glickman, 1986; Edwards, 1993).

Contracts

Contracts are written agreements between students, teachers, counselors, and other facilitators. Students determine those helpful behaviors that they want to increase, the steps they want to use to make the change, and a timeline for the improvement. Contracts may include the steps for supporting student success and the consequences for the sought change. Contracts can be an effective way of clarifying the students' involvement in their behavior improvement process. Contracts with students always are based on mutual respect and the personal agreement of both parties (Wolfgang & Glickman, 1986; Epanchin, et al., 1994).

Peer Groups

Peer groups are an organization of various groups of students for student support in all areas of development; emotional, social, physical, and academic. Peer groups can use numerous combinations of students helping students. Teachers, counselors, and other facilitators can informally "connect" students, or class meetings can be used to determine ways students can belong in the classroom and help each other. Peer groups are important connections for student growth, cooperation and support. Student partners, or groups within grade levels and between grade levels, provide all students opportunities to contribute, develop social skills, and develop a sense of belonging within the classroom and school building (Epanchin, et al., 1994: Dreikurs, et al., 1971).

The Relationship Between Classroom Climate and Behavior Management

The comprehensive behavior-management plan provides a conscious framework and process for an intentionally inviting climate to be created in the classroom and school. Students know what to expect and are respected members of the behavior-management team. The plan supports staff and student to interact in enhanced ways because of learning experiences and skill development for both students and staff.

The integration of the self-concept series concepts and activities into the behavior plan adds needed congruency between the " walk and talk" of adult-student interactions. Assessing the differences between what we say we believe about students and the way we treat students can be used as a means of observing and evaluating the effectiveness of existing school behavior policy and a guide for the formulation of new policy (Radd, 1996 a).

The characteristics of an inviting climate include the need for students to experience cooperation and the democratic process where students are respected and valued as important members of the classroom. Class meetings, democratic rule formulation and the use of problem solving are keys in the behavior-management

plan and support the characteristics of an inviting climate. Students are a part of establishing and experiencing a democratic base in the classroom environment.

In addition, the comprehensive behavior-management plan provides the process for cooperative groups to involve students working together on behavior solutions, social, emotional and academic projects in groups of two, three, or four for the majority of the time. Students can be grouped according to the goals of the assignment. Small cooperative group rules may be formulated during classroom meetings as the classroom rules were formulated. Problem solving, decision making, problem ownership, communication skills and other guidance skills learned through student developmental guidance activities are used during all student cooperative groups. The teacher uses the same facilitation skills used during classroom meetings to facilitate small cooperative groups. (Radd, 1996 b & c)

Larger groups can be used dependent on the lesson and needs of the group. Peer groups are integrated throughout the students' day as appropriate. This utilization of peer groups can give students a greater sense of belonging and value in the classroom. These concepts are further supported by the research in control theory, recently changed to be called choice theory, and cooperative learning in the classroom (Glasser, 1986; Johnson & Johnson, 1994).

The comprehensive behavior-management plan provides the process for the teacher to move into a more effective, facilitative role instead of a traditional, autocratic role (Witmer & Myrick, 1989). Teachers need to practice facilitative skills in order to put the behavior plan concepts in place. The comprehensive behavior-management plan supports the creation and development of the invitational model by incorporating those interaction characteristics that facilitate and depict an intentionally inviting relationship between professionals and students. Intentionally inviting practices are clear, conscious interactions and attitudes which allow true growth of staff and students (Radd, 1996 a).

Student feedback regarding the teacher-student interaction can be helpful in determining ways of supporting students and encouraging teacher growth. The Invitational Teaching Survey-Primary & Intermediate (ITS-P&I) (Radd, 1996 d) is an instrument used to assess the inviting practices of the teacher as perceived by the students. This information can be used to assess possible growth areas within classroom interactions that may block the learning process in any of the domains, social, emotional, physical, and intellectual. The use of the ITS-P&I can be another way of supporting the creation of the inviting classroom climate and improving the implementation of the comprehensive behavior-management plan.

Results and Conclusions

There is a relationship between the behavioral interactions between student and teacher and the student feeling invited to learn and belong to the classroom group. The comprehensive behavior-management plan provides a framework that can intentionally develop and support the inviting classroom climate.

Research findings strongly recommend the best practice of viewing discipline as an instrument for teaching helpful behavior versus a means to control students. Proactive approaches to discipline are keys in discipline plans. Discipline can not be an end in itself but student development becomes the primary goal of teaching and management efforts. Proactive positive approaches and constructive problem-solving approaches need to serve as goals for prevention. It is key to eliminate the use of reactive practices to discipline (Walker, Colvin & Ramsey, 1995).

The comprehensive behavior-management plan which includes goals, competencies and outcomes; the self-concept series and weave; class meetings and rules; decision making and problem solving; problem ownership; activities regarding behavior; encouragement; contracts; and, peer groups create a plan based in the best practice with student development as the primary goal.

The characteristics of an inviting climate of respect for individual uniqueness; cooperative spirit; sense of belonging; pleasing habitat; positive expectations; and, vital connections to society are created and supported through a conscious, intentional process- implementing a comprehensive behavior-management plan.

References

- Aspy, D., & Roebuck, F. (1977). *Kids don't learn from people they don't like*. Amherst, MA: Human Resource Development Press.
- Brattesani, K. A., Weinstein, R. S., & Marshall, H. H. (1984). Student perceptions of differential teacher treatment as moderators of teacher expectation efforts. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 76, (2), 236-247.
- Briggs, D. (1970). *Your child's self esteem: The key to his life*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., Inc.
- Dreikurs, R., Greenwald, B., & Pepper, F. (1971). *Maintaining sanity in the classroom: Illustrated teaching techniques*. New York: Harper and Row Publishers,
- Edwards, C.H. (1993). *Classroom discipline and management*. New York: MacMillan.
- Emmet, J., Monsour, S., Lundeberg, M., Russo, T., Secrist, K., Lindquist, N., Moriarity, S., & Uhren, P. (1996). Open classroom meetings: Promoting peaceful schools. *Elementary School Guidance & Counseling Journal*, 31, 3-10.
- Epanchin, B., Townsend, B., & Stoddard, K. (1994). *Constructive classroom management*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/ Cole.
- Fields, M., & Boesser, C. (1994). *Constructive guidance and discipline*. New York: Merrill.
- Ginott, G.H. (1972). *Between teacher and child - a book for parents and teachers*. New York: MacMillan.
- Glasser, W. (1986). *Control theory in the classroom*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers.
- Gysbers, N.C., & Henderson, P. (1994). *Developing and managing your school guidance program*. Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association.
- Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. (1994). *Learning together and alone*. Needham, MA.: Allyn and Bacon.

- McWhirter, J. J., McWhirter, B. T., McWhirter, AM., & McWhirter, E. (1993). *At-risk youth: A comprehensive response*. Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing.
- Myrick, R. D. (1993). *Developmental guidance and counseling: A practical approach* (2nd ed.) Minneapolis: Educational Media Corporation.
- Nelson, J. (1985). *Positive discipline*. Fair Oaks, CA Sunrise Press.
- Purkey, W. W. (1970). *Self-concept and school achievement* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Purkey, W.W., & Novak, J. M.(1996). *Inviting school success*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co.
- Radd, T.R. (1996 a). *The grow with guidance system manual* (2nd Ed, Revised.) Canton, OH: Grow With Guidance.
- Radd, T.R. (1993. revised 1996 b). *The grow with guidance system levels one through seven*. 2nd ed.) Canton, OH: Grow With Guidance.
- Radd, T.R. (1996 c). *The grow with guidance system levels eight and nine*. (2nd ed.) Canton, OH: Grow With Guidance.
- Radd, T.R. (1996 d). *The invitational teaching survey -primary and intermediate*. 2nd edition, revised). Canton, OH: Grow With Guidance.
- Thompson, C., & Rudolph, L. (1996). *Counseling children*, (4th ed.). Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/ Cole.
- Walker, H.M., Colvin, G., & Ramsey, E.(1995). *Antisocial behavior in school: strategies and best practices*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.
- Witmer, J., & Myrick, R. (1989). *The teacher as facilitator*. Minneapolis: Educational Media Corporation.
- Woffgang, C. H., & Glickman, C.D. (1986). *Solving discipline problems*. Newton, MA Allyn and Bacon.

Tommy R. Radd is an associate professor in the Department of Counseling at The University of Nebraska at Omaha.