EDS 743

Theories of Behavior

An effective theoretical perspective on the causes for classroom problems will enable teachers to develop clear and concise explanations about causes of behavior problems, generate a series of intervention options for solving the problems, and make predictions about the future learning and behavior of the student.

The following are six current theoretical perspectives that provide teachers ways of thinking about behavior and learning in the classroom (Buskist & Gerbing, 1990). While each perspective has a focus for explaining student behavior, similarities exist between the six perspectives. A theoretical perspective helps teachers examine their assumptions about the factors that contribute to behavior problems.

A teacher's theoretical perspective shapes how a teacher thinks about a student's behavior. The teacher may not understand the full range of possible causes of a behavior problem if the teacher is unable to evaluate the behavior from several theoretical perspectives. After all, how we think about a problem will dictate how we go about solving it. For example, a teacher who assumes there is a chemical basis for a problem (e.g., chemical imbalance) will understandably focus on a medical intervention for the student. Conversely, a teacher who views a problem as primarily environmental may focus instead on consequences of the behavior and provide more positive reinforcement.

Behavioral and Behavioral Modification Perspective

Behavior modification is especially prevalent in special education. Baer (1988) described the important link between behavior modification and special education: "The application of behavior analysis is almost always educational, in the best and broadest sense of the word; and special education is the branch of education that most requires an applicable analysis of behavior in order to teach" (p. ix).

Teachers who adopt a behavioral perspective believe that students' learning results from an interaction between the behavior and environment. The environment includes all events, activities, and situations that precede or follow a student's behavior. Behavior is defined as any observable, measurable event or action. Conditions that occur just prior to a behavior, such as classroom organization, instructional materials, and teacher directions, are called antecedents. In short, how a teacher arranges the antecedents and consequences that follow a behavior will determine the future occurrence of that behavior. Using behavior modification, teachers can increase appropriate behavior or decrease inappropriate behavior either by adjusting antecedent conditions or by applying reinforcers or punishers.

A behavior modification program incorporates four general procedures. First, the teacher must identify the problem. For example, the teacher might determine that a student has a poor self-concept. Second, the problem must be analyzed and explained in terms of observable and measurable behaviors (Baer, 1988). The teacher defines self-concept using clear, observable, and measurable terms, such as how frequently a student smiles, volunteers answers in class, makes positive self-statements, and achieves at a high academic level.

The third general procedure of behavior modification is that the teacher systematically arranges the learning environment and applies reinforcement and punishment procedures to modify (i.e., increase or decrease) the occurrence of the, behavior in question. For example, the teacher may devise a program that increases the frequency of certain behaviors that are already present. The teacher may weaken the frequency of an inappropriate behavior or teach an entirely new skill the student has never demonstrated (e.g., teach expressive language to a child who is severely disabled). Finally, the teacher records the number of times the behavior occurs to determine the effectiveness of the behavior modification program.

How Does Behavior Modification View Student Behavior?

The underlying assumption of behavior modification is that all behavior, acceptable or unacceptable, is learned. Behaviorists (Le.., practitioners who subscribe to the behavioral approach) believe that learning is determined in part by the feedback the student receives from the environment. Therefore, a child who is willful and difficult to manage in the classroom is not considered by a behaviorist to have a genetic predisposition toward disruptive behavior. Instead, the behaviorist assumes the student can be taught appropriate alternative behaviors. By applying this assumption, behaviorists believe students can be taught appropriate behavior, while inappropriate behavior can be reduced and replaced with more acceptable alternatives. Based upon these assumptions, the teacher plays a prominent role in the management of student classroom behavior.

Teachers are considered in the best position to control consequences in the classroom and teach students appropriate classroom behavior. Less direct approaches to changing student behavior, such as psychoanalytic counseling, are not considered viable options for addressing disruptive behaviors. Duke and Meckel 0984) point out that just as the conduct of students is controlled ". . . the teachers

who utilize Behavior Modification may need to consider their own behavior and how it may be subject to reinforcement from classroom environment" (p. 16). A prominent feature of behavior modification programs is for tl1e teacher to assess how his or her behavior is influenced, and perhaps controlled, by student behavior.

Even though the behavioral approach focuses on observable and measurable behavior, it does not exclude the role or diminish the importance of the neurological aspects of learning. Wolery, Baily, and Sugai 0988) assume that learning has a neurological basis, and the developmental aspects of learning must be acknowledged when planning an instructional program. However, individuals who are designing and implementing behavior modification programs place "primary emphasis on observable behavior as well as the observable antecedents and consequences to behavior" (p. 10).

As part of an effective behavior management program, a teacher must collect data on the academic performance and social behavior of the students. Problem behavior may be caused by inadequate instruction or poor organization. Teachers who use behavior modification procedures look less to the curriculum and instruction as causes of misbehavior and more to features of the environment that reinforce disruptive behavior. Consequently, some behavior modification programs are not integrated into the instructional program. The behavioral approach does not require teachers to analyze instruction to determine what fosters behavior problems. The focus of most behavioral approaches is correction rather than prevention, and our view is that prevention is far more effective.

Biophysical Perspective

What Is It? Definition, History, and Critical Features

Teachers who adopt a biophysical perspective look for explanations about behavior in the structure and function of the brain, in genetics, and in the physiological and neurological influences on student behavior (Alberto & Troutman, 2003). Teachers who adopt this perspective look for problems with genetic structures, brain structure, and function, and "how drugs and other chemicals affect our behavior, our thoughts, and our emotions" (Buskist & Gerbing, 1990, p. 7). When studying a student's behavior, the teacher considers the full range of biological variables and their influence on the student's behavior.

The biophysical perspective has played a prominent role in education. This is particularly true in special education, where the biophysical perspective has been used to explain and predict the behavior and learning of students with learning disabilities, mental retardation, attention deficit disorders, and behavior disorders. With the explosion of technology in the last decade, the biophysical perspective has become increasingly popular in education and psychology as a way to determine the physical factors responsible for behavior. In addition, there has been an explosion of interest in how the brain affects learning and how teachers can develop new instructional and management programs that reflect brain research (Buskist & Gerbing, 1990).

How Does the Biological Perspective View Student Behavior?

Proponents of the biophysical approach believe that all behavior problems have a physical origin. Biophysical problems that result in behavior and learning problems are (a) central nervous system dysfunctions, (b) allergies, (c) metabolic deficits, and (d) a genetic predisposition to noncompliant behavior. Even though proponents of this orientation acknowledge that environmental or instructional factors contribute to learning and behavior problems of a student, they believe the primary source of a student's problems is biophysical. The teacher will typically defer to a physician to determine the source of problem behavior.

How Do I Use the Biological Perspective in My Classroom?

Using this perspective, the teacher typically follows a two-phase intervention procedure. First, the teacher observes a student's problem behavior and attempts to determine if there is a biological or neurological basis for the behavior. If a student exhibits inattention and hyperactivity, the teacher may first attempt to modify the instructional program or the level of reinforcement. If a student demonstrates extreme inattention during instructional activities, the teacher might hypothesize the behavior has a physical cause. The teacher might recommend to the parents a complete medical evaluation by a pediatrician to determine if the student has an attention deficit disorder. In a case like the one above, a pediatrician might prescribe Ritalin to increase the student's attention and decrease hyperactivity in the classroom. _he school psychologist or pediatrician would advise the teacher to look for possible side effects (e.g., headaches, stomachaches, tic disorders, lack of appetite) and to systematically observe the student's behavior while on medication.

Advantages and limitations of the **Biological Perspective Advantages.** Research suggests that medication helps about 70% of children with attention deficit disorder become more focused and less active during classroom instruction (Neuwirth, 1994). In addition, there are many anecdotal reports of teachers and parents indicating that medication is helpful for students. The biophysical perspective may be particularly useful with students who have extreme forms *of* problem behavior. For example, students with seizure disorders, severe

hyperactivity, or very poor attention problems benefit from medical interventions.

The biophysical perspective can be applied to students *of* various ages and ability levels. Teachers most concerned with problem behaviors associated with attention deficit disorder will find the biophysical perspective adaptable to their classrooms.

Limitations. A problem with the biophysical perspective in that its primary focus is on factors outside the province *of* the teacher's influence. Proponents sometimes assume that a student's behavior problem can be fixed by altering a child's diet to eliminate a food allergy thought to contribute to the problem, or by using a medication to help a child focus. Research suggests the use *of* Ritalin, for example, does not always translate into improved academic performance. Professionals and parents alike have been critical *of* the use *of* medications to manage behaviors associated with hyperactivity (e.g., attention deficit disorder) (Silver, 1995).

Many classroom factors must be considered in understanding a student's behavior. If a student's attention deficit (e.g., failing to maintain attention during science) is perceived as primarily caused by neurological or biological factors, the teacher might fail to develop classroom interventions before investigating medical interventions.

Psychoeducational Perspective What Is It? Definition? History, and Critical Features

The psychoeducational perspective assumes behavior problems result from unconscious motivations that direct a child's actions. Professionals who subscribe to this perspective believe behavior problems are caused by a student's motivation to fulfill specific needs "for attention, revenge, power, and assumed disability (i.e., the desire to be left alone) or any *of* these together" (Kaplan & Carter, 1995, p. 11). The psychoeducational perspective is an extension *of* Freud's 0938) psychoanalytical approach. Alfred Adler 0962) was one *of* the first professionals to translate Freud's

ideas into a systematic and practical approach for dealing with a child's behavior problems in the home and classroom.

While the psychoeducational perspective has been on the wane for sometime, it is now regaining popularity as an approach for managing disruptive behavior, providing a psychoeducational perspective with students who are seriously emotionally disturbed.

Cooperative Discipline is a psychoeducational approach to discipline and is based on the work *of* Alfred Adler and Rudolph Dreikurs. This approach is based largely on the premise that misbehavior should receive natural or logical consequences, and if a teacher understands a student's motive for unacceptable behavior, the teacher can design an effective plan to help the student. Training in this approach is based on several books by Dreikurs such as *Discipline Without Tears* 0974) and *Maintaining Sanity in the Classroom* 0982). A program entitled *Cooperative Discipline* 0990) by

Linda Albert is also based largely on the work of Dreikurs and Adler. Albert's Cooperative Discipline program will be used as a model of a psychoeducational approach.

The Cooperative Discipline model is based on two fundamental concepts. The first is that students choose their behavior. Although environmental conditions may invite a behavior, the student is free to choose how to behave. If the teacher assumes student behavior is based on choice, the teacher can begin to influence a student's decisions about how to behave.

.The second basic concept of Cooperative Discipline is that the goal of student behavior is to satisfy a need to belong. Students choose different behaviors to feel a sense of belonging in different environments such as clubs, teams, or home. The student is usually trying to achieve one of four immediate goals: attention, power, revenge, or avoidance-of-failure. When a teacher recognizes a student's need to belong, he or she can help the student choose appropriate behaviors to achieve a special place in the classroom.

A teacher's thoughtful reaction to a student's misbehavior might be accomplished by a five-step School Action Plan, which serves as the procedural heart of Cooperative Discipline. Each step is described below.

Step 1: Pinpoint and describe the student's behavior.

The teacher cannot rely on subjective judgments that the student is lazy, for example, but must describe the problem objectively. The objective observation that "Thomas fails to hand in two or three assignments each week" focuses on what happens, not on how the teacher feels about what happened.

Step 2: Identify goal of misbehavior.

Once the teacher has identified the problem behavior, he or she has information to make a judgment about what the student is trying to accomplish with the misbehavior. The teacher then determines if the student is seeking attention, power, revenge, or avoidance-of-failure.

Step 3: Design specific intervention techniques.

Intervention should be based on what the student is trying to achieve with the misbehavior. For example, if the student is trying to get attention, the teacher might minimize the behavior by ignoring it or distract the student by changing the activity. If the goal of the misbehavior is to seek power, the teacher might use time-out or set a consequence, such as losing an activity. **Step 4: Select encouragement techniques to build self-esteem. **

Interventions for misbehavior are viewed as stopgap measures that will not prevent future occurrence. To prevent recurrence, the teacher must plan interventions to help the student feel more capable. Specific techniques, such as asking the student to help with a lesson, may help the student connect with classmates or feel like a contributing member of the class. When the student's self-image improves, he or she has less need to misbehave to create a sense of belonging.

Step 5: Involve parents as partners.

Specific suggestions are given for increasing parental involvement and support. For example, parents can help with their child's homework or visit the school to provide emotional support. All previous steps are strengthened if teachers, students, and parents participate in the plan. Information is provided on productive parent-teacher conferences and how to develop a Home Action Plan.

How Does the Psychoeducational Perspective View Student Behavior?

The etiology of disruptive behavior is a function of an underlying, unconscious motivation of the student. If a student has an underlying need to feel a sense of belonging in the classroom and does not have academic and social skills to achieve this, then the student will engage in disruptive behavior. The student uses this behavior to gain status that he/she does not know how to gain through socially acceptable means.

How Can I Use the Psychoeducational Perspective in My Classroom?

In a middle-school classroom, a student named Elliot frequently says hurtful things to the teacher. One day when reviewing an assignment, Elliot, who is sometimes witty, uses a sarcastic and disrespectful tone toward the teacher in reading his vocabulary definitions. The goal of this behavior is to get attention, and the rude\one is designed to anger the teacher.

Cooperative Discipline employs six guidelines for avoiding and diffusing confrontations such as this.

Guideline 1: Focus on the behavior, not the student. *Guideline* 2: Take charge of negative emotions. *Guideline* 3: Avoid escalating the situation. *Guideline* 4: Discuss the misbehavior later. *Guideline* 5: Allow the student to save face. *Guideline* 6. Model non-aggressive behavior.

Mason monitors Jason's academic performance more frequently to afford him more positive attention during class. He recommends Mr. Mason ask Jason questions during class to provide him more opportunities to participate and learn. The psychologist advises Jason's parents to use a behavioral contract to increase Jason's motivation to complete homework.

Advantages and limitations of the **Ecological Perspective**

Advantages. Research demonstrates the effectiveness of the ecological approach with students with behavior problems because of the strong focus on initial assessment and translation of that information into intervention. The ecological perspective may be particularly adaptable to problems of students in middle school and high school. Because the causes of behavior problems with these students are often complex, a comprehensive restructuring of a student's relationship with family, friends, and teachers is often necessary.

Limitations. Because the ecological perspective is a systems approach and focuses on many different areas, it is difficult for a teacher to make significant modifications in each identified ecosystem. For example, ecological interventions may require modification in a student's family relationships, involvement with community, or school activities. Although instructional factors are important considerations, the ecological perspective does not inform teachers about important instructional design features. Interventions with an ecological focus are typically not proactive, because the teacher institutes programs such as Cooperative Discipline in *response* to

behavior problems. Because an eco-behavioral assessment takes considerable time to complete, most teachers don't use this approach unless faced with very difficult behavior problems in the classroom.

Social Learning Perspective

What Is It? Definition, History, and Critical Features

Proponents of the social learning perspective believe a student's behavior is influenced by more than just the learning environment or inner forces (Bandura, 1995). Instead, behavior is influenced by the interactions between the student's feelings, school and home environments, and behavior. Assertive Discipline is an example of a classroom management program based on the social learning perspective. Canter and Canter (1976) define an assertive teacher as "One who clearly and firmly communicates her wants and needs to her students and is prepared to reinforce her words with appropriate actions. She responds in a manner which maximizes her potential to get her needs met, but in no way violates the best interests of the students" Cp. 9). Assertive Discipline provides a framework for the teacher to communicate to students the limits of their behavior in the classroom and clear consequences for disruptive behavior. Canter and Canter developed Assertive Discipline because they felt teachers were not adequately trained to respond effectively to disruptive behavior. Assertive Discipline requires teachers to take control of the classroom by (a) utilizing an assertive teaching style, (b) specifying behaviors expected of students and those not tolerated, and (c) developing a plan for increasing appropriate and decreasing inappropriate behavior.

According to Canter and Canter (1976), teachers develop conceptualizations of the causes of misbehavior that serve only to limit their effectiveness in properly managing behavior. Moreover, teachers often attribute classroom behavior problems to factors beyond their control (e.g., emotional disturbance, brain damage, inadequate intelligence, inadequate parenting, low socioeconomic status). Teachers do not empower themselves, per Canter and Canter, to influence student behavior in positive ways by setting firm limits.

Canter (1989) believes many professionals have misinterpreted Assertive Discipline by assuming the key element is providing negative consequences for misbehavior. The key to effective Assertive Discipline, Canter states, is "catching students being good" and applying positive consequences for appropriate behavior (p.58). Assertive Discipline is based on a balance between the rights of teachers and the rights of students. The teacher has the right to determine and request appropriate behavior from students, and students have the right to choose how to behave and to know of the consequences that will follow their behavior (Canter, 1989).

With Assertive Discipline, teachers are taught to (a) communicate their expectations clearly, (b) attend to both positive and negative student behavior actively, and (c) use consequences for both appropriate and inappropriate student behavior persistently. The Assertive Discipline approach has three major program characteristics: (a) a discipline plan, (b) consequences of misbehavior, and (c) positive discipline. Each component is discussed below.

The discipline plan. The teacher presents class rules to students at the beginning of the school year and describes consequences for rule violations. This is an important feature of Assertive Discipline, because without it, teachers rely on spur-of-the-moment consequences for treating student misbehavior, often forcing them to negotiate and explain every consequence to misbehaving students. As Canter 0989) points out, "That is not an effective way to teach" (p. 59). By adhering to the discipline plan, Canter argues that teachers can be more consistent in their delivery of consequences. The discipline plan is sent home at the beginning of the school year to inform parents of the teacher's behavioral expectations. This explicit communication to students and parents delineates the roles and responsibilities of each participant in the learning process. It also allows teachers to enlist parental support in managing student behavior.

Consequences of misbehavior. The feature of Assertive Discipline that is most well known and also most misunderstood is the method used to deliver consequences for student misbehavior. A misperception of Assertive Discipline is that the teacher stands in front of the class, discussing rules and consequences, and writing students' names on the board when they misbehave. In response to this misperception, Canter 0989) states, "Assertive Discipline is not a negative program, but it can modify behavior. Canter and Canter developed Assertive Discipline because they felt teachers were not adequately trained to respond effectively to disruptive behavior. Assertive Discipline requires teachers to take control of the classroom by (a) utilizing an assertive teaching style, (b) specifying behaviors expected of students and those not tolerated, and (c) developing a plan for increasing appropriate and decreasing inappropriate behavior.

Limitations. Assertive Discipline has no assessment component to help teachers evaluate their classroom for potential behavior problems. Consequently, management in this approach is largely reactive. A significant limitation *of* Assertive Discipline is that it does not consider one major source *of* misbehavior, poorly designed instructional programs, as a contributor to classroom disruption. *For* example, if a student's unmanageable behavior is caused by misplacement in a reading program, Assertive Discipline is not effective *for* rectifying the problem. It does not provide a mechanism for the teacher to evaluate critically the role *of* curriculum in classroom

management. One could argue that Assertive Discipline is not intended or designed to address instruction.

A comprehensive monitoring system is not provided for evaluation *of* learning and behavioral outcomes with Assertive Discipline. The lack *of* careful monitoring, especially with disabled students, can pose both practical and administrative problems for the teacher. Assertive Discipline is sometimes misused by teachers who focus only on negative consequences, making the classroom an aversive learning environment for students and teachers alike. A further limitation *of* Assertive Discipline is that it does not accommodate students *of* different ages. *For* example, the severity *of* consequences is the same for younger and older students.

Assertive Discipline does *not* provide teachers specific guidelines on proactive management techniques. While students are presented classroom rules at the beginning *of* the year and consequences for not adhering to those rules, Assertive Discipline does not provide guidelines for teaching students the skills that apply to the rules.

Instructional Perspective

What Is It? Definition? History and Critical Features

The instructional perspective is focused on managing student behavior from an instructional point *of* view. It is based on a rather simple proposition: The strategies for teaching and managing social behavior are *no* different from the strategies for teaching reading, earth science, or mathematics. Proponents believe that by their very nature, classroom and behavior management procedures are instructional, not merely behavioral or social, because they take place in the context of instruction and are designed to impart information to students. To impart information about how to behave, a teacher teaches, explains, directs, models, or otherwise communicates to a student how to behave and not behave. This process is no different than the process of teaching a concept, fact, or principle in mathematics or science.

The instructional perspective to classroom management has its origins in the development of the direct instruction model for teaching academic skills in the 1960s. Siegfried Engelmann and his colleagues developed Direct Instruction as a comprehensive system and organizational structure for looking at all aspects of instruction, including classroom organization and management, design of instructional programs, and quality of teacher and student interactions (Gersten, Woodward, & Darch, 1986). The principles of Direct Instruction have been integrated into specific, programmatic approaches for use with students of all ages and ability levels (Kame'enui & Simmons, 1997). Several examples of these programmatic approaches based on an instructional perspective include *CHAMPS, A Proactive Approach to Classroom Management,* (Sprick, Garrison, & Howard, 1998) and *Generalized Compliance Training* (Engelmann & Colvin, 1983). In addition, Kame'enui and Darch (1995) introduced *Instructional Classroom Management,* a programmatic approach applying instructional design principles to teaching students age-appropriate behaviors in the classroom and to eliminating disruptive classroom behavior. The primary difference between an instructional approach to classroom management and all other approaches *(all* other approaches not some or a few), including the approaches listed earlier, is that an instructional approach is proactive. This means that before an action or problem occurs, *the teacher teaches carefully, strategically, and to a high criterion level of performance all information required for students to behave appropriately.* More importantly, the teacher systematically sets up numerous opportunities to reinforce what's been taught and directly communicate to students how well they are doing as reflective and problem-solving citizens.

"Teaching carefully, strategically, and to a high criterion level of performance," all that is required for students to behave appropriately, doesn't sound very different from what most teachers do now. However, the shift in a teacher's focus and thinking on a day-to-day basis is significant and necessary if instructional management is to be successful.

How Does the Instructional Perspective View Student Behavior?

The basic assumption is that teachers must first teach students how to behave in every circumstance for which appropriate behavior is expected by the teacher. This holds true whether the behavior to be taught is an academic behavior, such as naming the capitals of all 50 states, or a social behavior, such as speaking politely to adults and other students. This assumption is fundamental to the instructional perspective and carries major implications for the role of the teacher in developing teaching and behavior management programs.

In addition, because the instructional perspective focuses on academic performance, teachers will be helping lower-achieving students compete in subject areas. Teaching and reviewing appropriate social behaviors helps students maintain these skills throughout the school year.

The instructional approach to management is adaptable and effective for students of different age and ability levels. In addition, because the instructional perspective takes into consideration a student's academic performance level, the organization of academic

lessons, and the structure of the classroom, teachers in all content areas will find this approach adaptable to their teaching circumstances.

One of the strongest features of the instructional perspective is that it is an integral part of a teacher's regular instructional program. Teachers who adopt this perspective manage classrooms under the assumption that if students are not behaving appropriately, it is imperative for the teacher to teach necessary social and learning skills. Most importantly, this intervention perspective provides the instructional details of how to effectively teach these skills.