

PROMOTING POSITIVE BEHAVIOURS FOR PRIMARY AND HIGH SCHOOLS – AN ACT EXPERIENCE

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This paper describes two projects developed in the ACT Department of Education and Training to improve student behaviours utilising the Positive Behaviour Support/ Effective Behaviour Support framework, and emphasising pedagogy as a central behaviour change tool.

It has been recognised in the literature for some time that “the nature of the relationship between achievement and behaviour problems is clearly reciprocal. (Kauffmann, '97, Scott, Nelson and Liaupsin, '01, Walker et al '98)”ⁱ The approach taken in both of the projects reflects this knowledge.

Project 1 is the Promoting Positive Behaviours for Primary Schools project which was developed after an ACT Government Budget Initiative grant in 2000. The original primary school program involved 17 schools which were targeted for the receipt of this resource, and funded to attend the course in school hours. The number of staff attending the course varied from the whole school to one third of the staff, based on a range of determinants including socio-economic indicators, literacy and numeracy test results, and school counsellor and district director recommendation.

Following the success of the initial series of workshops, other interested primary schools were invited to participate. The program has since been conducted seven times for around 350 primary teachers in government schools.

The guiding principles of the primary program are as follows: It is based on the Positive Behaviour Support framework as described in Sugai et alⁱⁱ. It has twin strands of prevention and remediation, stressing the importance of the link between observation, hypothesis and strategy development.

In addition, the program involves a balance of action and reflection, with homework tasks, discussion of readings and sharing of effective strategies forming an integral part of the course.

The content of the five teacher workshops:

Session 1

- Overview of the PBS framework
- Continuum of academic and behaviour supports for all students
- Choosing a case
- Observation tasks

Session 2

- Setting Events and Triggers
- The school as a series of setting events
- The classroom ecology – routines, organisation, communication
- Teacher instructions as triggers

Session 3

- The Function of Challenging Behaviour
- Introduction to Functional Behaviour Assessment
- Developing a competing behaviours pathway plan
- Performance deficit versus skills deficit: the implications for strategy development

Session 4

- Challenging Behaviour and Special Needs
- Scaffolding for learning and behaviour: accommodations and adaptations
- ILP development (theoretical)

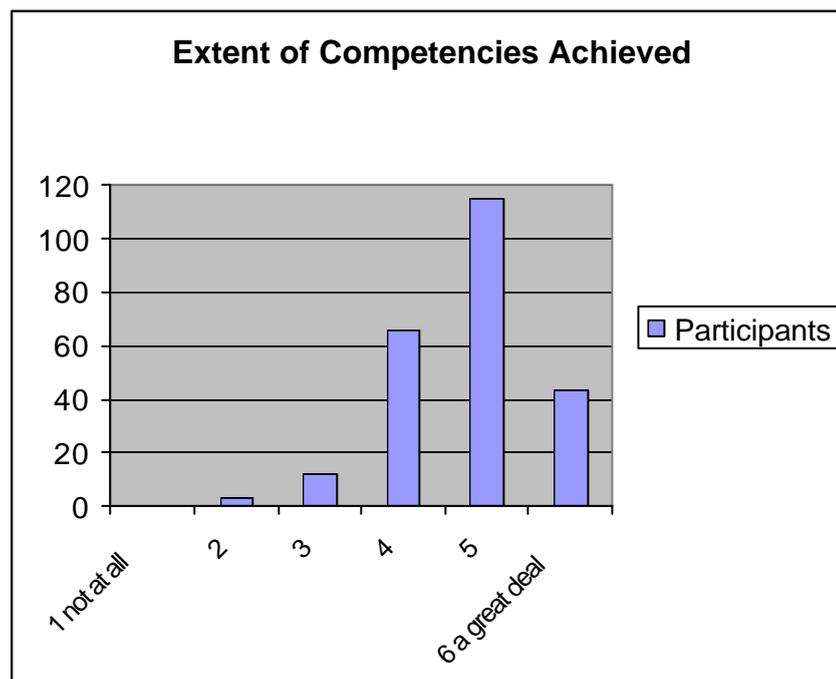
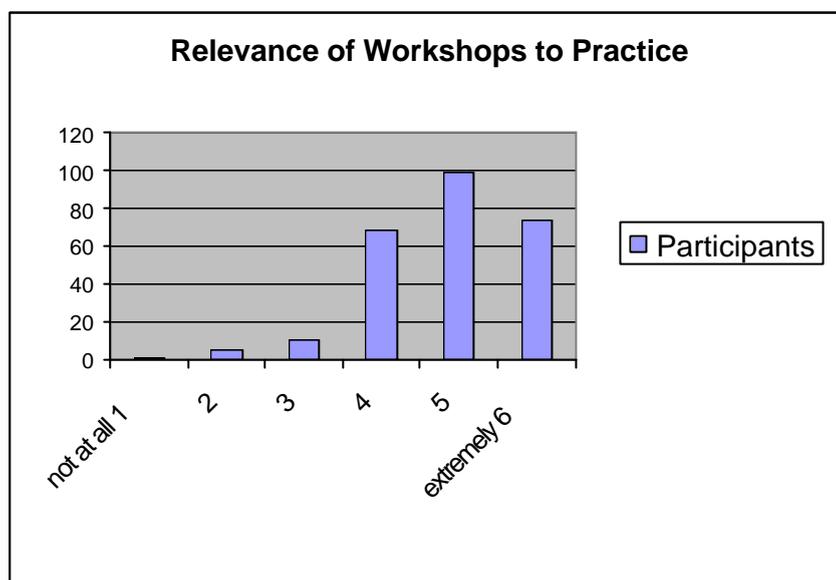
Session 5

- ILP development (practical)
- Crisis management – classroom plan
- Teacher stress – a cognitive behavioural approach

Evaluation, Project 1

The program was evaluated by collecting short-term and longer term (six months) data, based on teacher self-report (short-term) and principal and teacher report (six-month follow-up). Both quantitative and qualitative data was collected.

Quantitative Data N=302



Qualitative data: Sample teacher comments (short term)

“I wish I’d done this before I started teaching.”
“Why didn’t we do this course at uni?”
“I have begun implementing many of the ideas in the classroom and they are working.”
“This has been the most useful PD I have been to.”
“I like your solution-focussed approach.”
‘..a very practical course that makes classroom management easier.’
“..a great learning experience..should dynamically change my approach to teaching challenging students.”

Qualitative data: Sample teacher comments (six-month follow up)

As a result of my attending the workshops –
“..students are more settled and relaxed”
“...students respond better to instructions”
“I am more confident.”
”I consider the child’s needs more.”
“I am working with rather than against students.”
“I am more consistent / reflective / analytical regarding students with challenging behaviours.”

The five teacher workshops are supplemented by two workshops for school assistants working with the teachers attending the course. The first of these gives assistants an overview of the Positive Behaviour Support approach, and some practical strategies in the focus areas of setting events, triggers, behaviour function and maintaining consequences. The second assistants’ workshop is attended by the teacher and assistant together, and focuses on role clarification in student behaviour support.

Project 1: What have we learned?

The longer-term follow up study and principals’ reports indicate that the program is successful on different levels; with individual teachers, both beginning and experienced, and where all staff attend. The strength of the latter approach is that by undertaking the program with their staff, principals lend it credibility and approval. In addition, a common staff discourse, and potentially staff practice is more likely to follow from whole school involvement.

Principal, School A (Whole school attended)

“At the staff meeting after each session teachers took turns in leading a discussion of the current topic and how the strategies had been implemented and what was working.

Some teachers rearranged their classrooms and others took their lead and followed suit, which lead to great excitement and creativity in classroom arrangements.

We developed common strategies for calming children and getting their attention so that any teacher could go to any class and know what to do to get children’s attention.

More visual cues were created that assisted all children to follow directions and instructions.

Teachers felt secure in knowing that there was support from executive and from colleagues and that led to less stress and a calmer atmosphere across the school.”

Principal School B (90% of staff attended over 2 years)

The most experienced teachers seemed to get the most out of the program.

Principal School C (Train the trainer model)

..found that it was good for new teachers – most were very receptive to the ideas in the program.

Principal D (All staff attended)

Same comments as Principal Cⁱⁱⁱ

Project 2. is the Promoting Positive Behaviours for High Schools project which was developed following the success of the primary schools project, and requests for support from the high school principals in ACT government schools. This program aims to promote sustainable school change over a period of time, enhancing the learning and teaching environment through a model of positive learning and behaviour support.

The guiding principles for this project are

- The use of the Effective Behaviour Support approach as a framework for conversations and activities which focus on whole school change through improved pedagogy and behaviour support.
- Focus on changing the school culture from within by building the pedagogical and mentoring skills of a core team of teaching staff.
- Data-based decision making through regular staff and student surveys, as well as use of school data on student attendance, achievement and suspensions.

The Model

The model was developed and refined in consultation with high school principals in 2003. Underlying the model is the recognition that pedagogy and student behaviour are inextricably linked (cf footnote 1). In terms of process, the model aims to build a sense of “collective efficacy” among staff^{iv}. This is the shared perception among teachers of a school that their efforts will have a positive effect on student achievement. As Goddard, Hoy and Hoy^v put it: “There is strong reason to lead schools in a direction that will systematically develop teacher efficacy; such efforts may indeed be rewarded with continuous growth in not only collective teacher efficacy but also student achievement.” The decision to base the model around a core of teaching staff who develop both mentoring and pedagogical content skills throughout the program was based on these and similar considerations.

Following applications from interested high schools, three schools were selected with variations in size, socio-economic indicators, region and school structure, ie whether they were traditionally structured, faculty based schools, or sectioned into sub-schools based on school year – as the ACT secondary school system is split into high schools (years 7-10) and colleges (years 11-12), this means four sub-schools.

Key people within the schools:

Each school nominates a mentor team consisting mostly of classroom teachers, with one executive staff member and the school counsellor if possible. These teams range in size from 6 to 9 according to the size of the school. The team members develop, through tailored workshops throughout the 18 months, process and content skills to support their colleagues.

Each mentor team is headed by a coach (0.5 position) chosen from among the staff. The coach holds this position for 12 months, and also sits on the executive team for that period of time. The role of the coach is to coordinate the activities of the mentor team, and support them in their functions, as well as being a link between the mentor team, the program coordinator and the executive.

Key people supporting the schools:

The program coordinator's role is to lead and coordinate the program across the three schools and support the schools in furthering the aims of the program.

The role of the program facilitator is consultancy on all aspects of the Effective Behaviour Support approach to the schools, and data collection and analysis.

In addition, the program is supported by members of the department's Student Management Team. Two or three consultants visit each school regularly to meet with and support key in-school staff.

The program has an 18-month time frame, and the coach position is funded for twelve months.

- Content: The phases of the program can be described as follows:
Introduction to the Effective Behaviour Support model
- Understanding the cognitive, social and emotional needs of adolescents.
- Mentor skills training
- Pedagogical content skills training

Data collection: Data is collected throughout the program, and is used to inform decisions and set priorities in the areas of teaching and learning or student behaviour support. The focus for action in each school will be different, based on the findings. The data is not used for comparative purposes between the schools.

The following data is collected in all three schools:

- Staff survey of student support practices (school-wide, out-of-class, classroom and individual).
- Student survey of school behaviour support practices
- One-week staff sample of student challenges and celebrations
- Staff self-assessment survey of teaching practices.

In addition student achievement, attendance and suspension data will be collected throughout the program.

Outcomes:

The program's effectiveness will be judged in two areas; student outcomes (attendance, engagement, academic results) and enhancement of pedagogy. At the time of writing, the program has been underway for nine months.

Project 2: What have we learnt so far?

The consistent, visible support of the school executive, especially the principal and deputy, are vital to maintain the profile of the program in the school and to lend credibility to the work of the coach and mentor team.

The choice of staff for the coaching position is crucial, as the coach is required both to communicate with the executive team and coordinate and lead the mentor

team in their efforts to promote constructive discourse among staff about teaching and learning, and behaviour supports for all students.

Finally we have learned what we expected to find...and that is "...how change really is – messy, overloaded, relentless, fragmented...yet with the right capacities, amenable to positive action".^{vi} The professionalism, commitment and willingness to embrace ideas of large numbers of the teachers with whom we are working, continues to inspire us.

ⁱ Lann Valore, Claudia (2002) Spitting From Windmills: the Therapeutic Value of Effective Instruction. *Reclaiming Children and Youth* Vol 11 No 2 pp85-89

ⁱⁱ Sugai, Horner, Dunlap , Hieneman et al (2000) Applying Positive Behavior Support and Functional Behavior Assessment in Schools. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, Vol 2 No 3 pp131-143

ⁱⁱⁱ Minutes from Principals' Seminar O'Connell Education Centre ACT March 2004

^{iv} Hoy and Hoy (2003) *Instructional Leadership: A Learning Centred Guide* Allyn & Bacon Boston

^v in Hoy and Hoy (2003) *Instructional Leadership: A Learning Centred Guide* Allyn & Bacon Boston

^{vi} Michael Fullan (2003) *Education in Motion. Leading in a Culture of Change* Workshop Handbook