DOINGWHATWORKS

Presentation

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

Describing Behavior Problems in the Classroom

July 2009

Topic: Reducing Behavior Problems
Practice: Describe Behavior

Highlights

- In order to plan interventions that get at the root of problem behavior, not just the symptoms, it is vital to collect and analyze student-level data.
- By collecting data on what happened before, during, and after the behavior of concern, teachers can gain insight into the reasons behind this behavior. Many students may be acting out because they need attention, they do not possess the needed skills to perform the task, or the task is not challenging enough.
- With concrete and accurate data, collected over several weeks and in varying environments, teachers can devise interventions that fulfill students' needs and prevent the disruptive behavior.
- Teachers can look for resources and paths for collaboration available to them to help the data collection process. School and district counselors and behavior specialists can work with teachers to help with observations, data analysis, and intervention planning.

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Full Transcript

Slide 1: Welcome

Welcome to the overview on describing behavior problems in the classroom.

Slide 2: Mr. Thompson's dilemma

Mr. Thompson is used to having his third-grade students act out in his class. It's almost always the students who aren't doing well, which doesn't surprise him. How could any student perform well when they're so busy making jokes, passing notes, and chatting during instruction? After attending a professional development seminar on student behavior, however, he's starting to wonder if he has it backwards. Maybe his students aren't doing poorly because they act out. Maybe they're acting out because they're doing poorly.

Slide 3: Indicators, not definitions

Once we see behavior as an indicator of student need and not as a defining characteristic of the student himself, we can begin to address the problem.

Slide 4: Questions to ask

In order to understand the roots of student behavior, it's necessary to collect and analyze data. This can be a time-consuming process, requiring schools to prioritize which students most need this type of investment.

Questions to ask when assessing the need for data collection include: Is it developmentally appropriate? Is the student's behavior persisting? Does it threaten the safety of the students or teacher? Does it prevent other students from learning? Is it spreading to other students?

If the answers to any of these questions are positive and there is a need for a more in-depth assessment, the behavior will need to be defined as specifically and objectively as possible so that connections and inferences are accurately made. "Danny is always disturbing others" is not as useful as "Danny repeatedly leaves his seat and distracts others during math class."

Slide 5: The case for data analysis

Research shows that data-informed interventions have a much higher chance to succeed than more generalized interventions.

Data can help reveal why students act the way they do. Many behaviors serve a purpose, and once that underlying purpose is understood, teachers can select strategies to help meet student needs and maintain an orderly classroom environment.

This understanding can also help ensure that teachers don't attempt interventions that inadvertently reinforce the problem behavior. If a student is looking for attention from teachers and peers, for example, stopping instruction in order to reprimand the student in front of the class may reinforce the problem.

Slide 6: Data to look for

Teachers should take all available information into account when analyzing data, including the student's academic history, past disciplinary referrals and their outcomes, and what is known about the student's life outside of school. Only with a thorough understanding of a student's background can an accurate assessment be made of what the student's academic, psychological, and social needs are. We cannot know why a student is behaving inappropriately until we know the student.

Slide 7: Methods of data collection

There are several ways to collect and organize data about specific incidents, from basic spreadsheets and frequency tables to more sophisticated analysis databases. What is important is the kind of data gathered and that it is gathered over a sufficient period of time. Data should be gathered over several weeks and clearly keep track of what happened immediately before the incident, what happened during and around the incident, and what happened immediately afterwards. This data should include concrete details about the environment, such as the lesson content, type of activity, level of difficulty, proximity of the teacher, what the teacher said, the behavior of other students, and other contextual factors. Data should also include the length and intensity of the behavior. With this information, patterns can begin to appear.

Slide 8: Patterns

As teachers look at this information, they can see which conditions are likely to elicit problem behaviors, and which conditions are not likely to do so. The more accurate the incident data, the clearer it becomes of what triggers behavior and what reinforces it. For example, if a student acts out to avoid dealing with a math practice, sending the student to the office will only reinforce this behavior. Instead, the teacher can send the student to the library to continue working on the task without interfering with the class. At the same time, the teacher should look for tutoring opportunities to strengthen the student's math skills.

Slide 9: School and district collaboration

The task of data collection and analysis does not rest on the teacher alone. School and district behavior experts can work with teachers to conduct independent observations, facilitate data analysis, and propose interventions and strategies to address the needs reflected in the data collected.

Slide 10: Mr. Thompson's new insights

Mr. Thompson began keeping daily logs of the behavior of students that were disrupting his class. These logs detailed all occurrences of problem behavior, what preceded that behavior, and how he responded. After four weeks of observations, he saw clear patterns: One student, who had reading difficulties, showed disruptive behavior only during independent reading time. Another student showed signs of stress and got up from his seat when the noise levels in the classroom went up. With the help of the school psychologist, Mr. Thompson felt better able to address both the emotional and the academic needs of these students.

Slide 11: Learn more

To learn more about describing behavior problems in the classroom, please see the additional resources on the Doing What Works website.