Working with Students with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders (EBD) in CTE Classrooms

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Definition

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) defines emotional disturbance as follows: “...a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child’s educational performance:

(A) An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors.
(B) An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relations with peers and teachers.
(C) Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances.
(D) A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression.
(E) A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.”

As defined by IDEA, emotional disturbance includes schizophrenia but does not apply to children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they have an emotional disturbance.

Symptoms

Students with EBD are generally divided into two subcategories: those with externalizing behavior and those with internalizing behavior. Externalizing behavior includes aggression, disruption, and other forms of acting out; internalizing behavior includes such problems as depression, anxiety, and social withdrawal, in which the primary difficulty is private or internal. The most frequent problems observed by teachers are externalizing. However, internalizing problems can be debilitating, and students can have both types of problems, showing both types at the same time or alternating between the two.

Besides the two broad subcategories of externalizing and internalizing problems, EBD includes many other types of disorders. Kauffman and Landrum (2009) describe several subcategories of difficulty: attention and activity disorders, conduct disorders (which may be overt aggression or covert antisocial behavior), special problems of adolescence (which include delinquency, substance abuse, and early sexual activity), anxiety, depression, and schizophrenia. Many types of emotional disorders can occur together thus presenting themselves as co-morbid.
Career and Technical Education teachers are likely to notice a student’s ongoing problems with interpersonal relationships, for example, or signs of unreasonable anger, an eating disorder, or self-injurious behavior. In addition CTE teachers will need to concern themselves with EBD behaviors that may cause safety issues in lab settings. It is therefore necessary to equip teachers with effective behavior and engagement strategies such that students with EBD are better managed in classrooms.

Classroom Management

Build rapport by being polite and applying rules consistently. In addition, when you question the student’s behavior, do give him or her opportunity to respond and don’t go back and forth arguing with them. It is very important as well to avoid glaring at the student, stand over them, intimidate or further agitate them. Keep in mind that students should not be able to avoid or escape assigned work by sulking, showing that they are agitated or trying to delay working. When a student is agitated don’t make demands or initiate contact unless there is an emergency and sometimes it is helpful to give students one direction at a time. Be specific and direct.

Evidence-Based Strategies

While teacher-led classroom management strategies can be effective when working with students with EBD, it is particularly useful to teachers when students can be taught to self-monitor and assist peers. Two such student-led strategies that have been found to be specifically helpful are the Good Behavior Game and Class-wide Peer Tutoring.

Good Behavior Game - The Good Behavior Game (GBG) is a classroom-based behavior management strategy that teachers can use along with a school's standard instructional curricula. GBG uses a classroom-wide game format with teams and rewards to reduce aggressive and disruptive classroom behavior, which is a risk factor for adolescent and adult illicit drug abuse, alcohol abuse, cigarette smoking, antisocial personality disorder (ASPD), structured around four core elements: classroom rules, team membership, self- and team-behavior monitoring, and positive reinforcement of individual team members and the team as a whole.

While implementing the GBG teachers will let the students know the behavioral expectations for that day which can also be the classroom or school rules already in place and that they will work as a team to achieve their behavioral goal for the day and for the whole team to win. For example, if they earn fewer than 5 check marks on the board for disruptive behaviors, they’ve won the game. Another example is that students strive to earn at least 5 check marks for being on-task and following class rules. With this “if you win, I win” system, students are quick to keep each other accountable for earning as few or as many check marks as possible. The GBG is flexible, and can be used for an entire class or part of a unit for e.g., during an activity.

The Good Behavior Game is a strategy, not a curriculum, and does not compete with instructional time. It provides teachers with consistent effective language to promote positive student behavior. The strategy is engaging, and students look forward to playing the Game. Students learn teamwork; they receive positive reinforcement for promoting and following classroom rules; and they practice monitoring and regulating their own behavior.

Class-wide Peer Tutoring (CWPT) - Class-wide Peer Tutoring (CWPT) is a reciprocal peer tutoring strategy that allows students to serve both as tutor (teacher) and tutee (student) to review and learn content area material. CWPT takes place the classroom 3-4 days per week. It only takes about 30 minutes per CWPT session. Students work in pairs; each has an equal amount of time each CWPT session to be the tutor and tutee. If there are an odd number of students, one group may work as a triad. In a content area class (e.g., business marketing), students spend a certain amount of time on (a) vocabulary review and (b) study guides during each CWPT session. All CWPT materials are created from the textbook and/or resources teachers are already using. CWPT would take place over at least 8-12 weeks. The teacher serves as a facilitator during each CWPT session making sure students are on-task and assigning points to their peers correctly.
Initial CWPT training (i.e., teaching students about CWPT, how to award points, teaching teachers about awarding bonus points to students) will take three or four days for about 30 minutes each day (the amount of time CWPT will take).

Based on research (including student responses on CWPT satisfaction questionnaires), benefits of CWPT include:
- Active engagement and frequent opportunities for students to respond (to course material)
- Students often experience more success using this type of cooperative learning tool
- Students are encouraged to work together (an important life skill)
- Students have frequent opportunities for feedback and error correction
- Student mastery of content area material is increased

For tools and scoresheets to help you implement GBG and CWPT in your classroom visit: http://ctsp.tamu.edu/instructional-videos/overview-of-ebd/toolbox/

**Additional Activities**

1. Implement GBG and CWPT during instruction with particular emphasis on:
   a. Recording class progress and specific benefits.
   b. Observations of effects on classes with unique profiles and individual student needs.
   c. Customizing for lab settings.

2. Create a Professional Learning Community with colleagues and share experiences and seek advice on ideas for improvement or customization.