Chapter Four

Identification, Assessment and Intervention

4.1. Identification

What is identification in special needs education?

Identification in special needs education is the process of detecting the presence of a certain developmental problem in students. It is the initial/first stage in the practice of inclusive/special needs education. The first signs of serious emotional disturbance are difficulties with basic biological functions or social responses(eating, sleeping, eliminating, responding to parents' attempts to comfort at infant age. At later ages slowness in learning to walk or talk is a sign of potential emotional difficulty at toddler age.

In short, failure to pass ordinary developmental milestone within a normal age range is a danger signal in emotional and cognitive development of children

Stow and Selfe(1989) identified the following as major symptoms of EBDs:

- ✓ Nervousness or emotional disturbance -sometimes also referred as neurotic disorders. This includes children with excessive fears, anxieties as well as quite and withdrawn children.
- ✓ The presence of developmental disorders or habits.
- ✓ Conduct disorders-also termed as antisocial or acting out behavior(stealing, aggression, vandalism or truancy
- ✓ Organic disorders: include disorders that have physiological origin such as temper tantrums which results from some forms of epilepsy/seizure disorder
- ✓ Psychotic behavior: includes childhood schizophrenia and may present abnormal fears, delusion, illusion and hallucination
- ✓ Educational and behavioral difficulties

You can identify and help children with emotional disorders by the following behaviors:

A. For aggressive maladjustment

- ✓ Does not go along gracefully with the decisions of the teacher or the group
- ✓ Is quarrelsome: fights often, gets mad easily
- ✓ Is bully
- ✓ Occasionally is disruptive of property

B. For withdrawn maladjustment:

- ✓ Is noticed by other children, is neither actively liked nor disliked-just left out
- ✓ Shy, timid/nervous, fearful, anxious, excessively quiet, tense
- ✓ Is easily upset, feelings are readily hurt

C. For general maladjustment:

- ✓ Needs unusual amount of prodding to get work completed
- ✓ Is inattentive or apparently lazy
- ✓ Exhibits nervous manners such as nail biting, sucking thumb or fingers, stuttering, extreme restlessness
- ✓ Is actively excluded by most of the children whenever they get a chance
- ✓ Is a failure in school for no apparent reason
- ✓ Is absent from school frequently or dislikes school intensely
- ✓ Seems to be more unhappy than most of the children
- ✓ Achieves much less in school than his ability indicates he should
- ✓ Is jealous or over competitive

4.2. Theoretical perspective on Assessment methods of EBDs

Definition of assessment

What is assessment in special needs/inclusive education?

Assessment in special needs/inclusive education refers to the process of measuring/determining the degree or severity of a certain problem in students. It is the second stage in the practice of inclusive/special needs education.

Assessment of EBDs, like assessment of problems in various academic areas, helps to:

- Identify those students who need special support
- Plan programs to address their problems
- Monitor progress towards reaching our goals
- An adequate assessment does not focus exclusively on student's behavior. An adequate/effective/inclusive assessment has the following characteristics:
- It considers the student's social and physical environments
- It values the student's thoughts and feelings about the circumstance
- It should be solution centered. That is, it should not merely/only be descriptive of what is but also should be a process that leads to suggested interventions
- It should be based on the most accessible and reliable sources of information. That is, it should not be on the base of speculation that can not be confirmed
- It should yield/produce a picture not only of the student but also of the context in which his/her behavior is causing concern

Different theoretical approaches lead to different questions being asked. The same assessment method may be used within different theoretical perspectives to collect different information. For example, the importance of involving the child's parents or caregiver has been highlighted. However, interviews with parents and caregiver conducted from different theoretical perspectives would seek different information, as shown in Table 2.

Often, because different information is considered relevant in different theories, different assessment methods will be used. Direct detailed observations in the situation where the problems occur will be considered very important from a behavioral perspective in order to identify the specific behavior that causes concern and the environmental events that control its occurrence. From a cognitive perspective the actual sequence of environmental events will be considered less important than the pupil's perception and interpretation of what happened. So interviewing the pupil is likely to be prioritized over direct observation.

Table 2 Information collected in interviews conducted from different theoretical perspectives with parents/caregiver

Theoretical perspective	Information collected
Behavioral	Information about the frequency and duration of target problematic behaviors at home and the environmental events surrounding their occurrence. The child's 'reinforcement history' for similar behaviors.
Cognitive	Information about the parents' perceptions, interpretations and feelings about the child's behavior and the actions being taken by the school.
Psychodynamic	Information about the child's early development and family relationships, paying particular attention to experiences that are seen as having had crucial emotional significance.
Systemic	Information about the parents' perceptions and their interpretation of the perceptions of others, such as the child and their teachers. Their hypotheses about ways in which everyone involved would be affected by particular changes.

Outlined below are some of the assessment methods most commonly used to gain an understanding of EBDS and to guide positive action. The methods are categorized according to the theoretical framework with which they are most closely associated. Further details about many of these methods and their implementation in schools can be found in Ayers *et al.* (2000) and Farrell (2006).

4.2.1. Behaviorally-based methods

Systematic observation is particularly characteristic of behaviorally-based assessment. It may be carried out by teachers, the pupil or support professionals such as behavior support teachers or educational psychologists. Information may be collected on:

• the frequency and/or duration of identified problematic behavior or of the positive behavior which it is hoped to encourage;

• the events or conditions in the environment that occur prior to and following the behavior and which may therefore be acting to encourage or reinforce it.

A number of systematic observation techniques are available. A crucial requirement of all of these is that the observer must define the behavior they are observing clearly before they start. If an observer is not familiar with the classroom and pupil(s) concerned they are likely to need to spend some time talking with the teacher and/or conducting unstructured observations first.

Time sampling and interval sampling are two observational methods that are often considered together. For both you must first identify one or more target behaviors (e.g. working, sitting, calling out, inappropriate talking).

Time sampling involves observing, say for 10 seconds, and on the tenth second recording whether or not the pupil at that moment is engaging in any of the target behaviors. The observation period might last in total for 20 minutes, with spot observations being made at the end of each 10-second period.

Interval sampling involves observing, say for 20 seconds, and at the end of that time spending 10 seconds recording whether or not the pupil has engaged in any of the behaviors during the preceding 20 seconds. The observation period may last in total for 20 minutes, with observations being made for the first 20 seconds of each half minute and the final 10 seconds of each half minute being spent recording those behaviors which had occurred at least once during the preceding 20 seconds. Interval sampling makes good use of a visiting observer's time in that more time is spent observing than is the case with time sampling. However, the number of students that can be observed is limited and it is not really practical for teachers and students to use. With time sampling the use of a quiet timer can allow teachers and students to sample behaviors such as 'in seat' and 'on task' throughout a lesson at longer intervals, such as 1-minute intervals. Both time and interval sampling are appropriate only for behaviors that occur frequently. If the behavior occurs less than once in 15 minutes, event sampling (see below) should be selected.

Realistic intervention targets can be set by collecting information on the frequency of key behaviors for comparison students in the same teaching group who are making satisfactory

progress. This recognizes, for example, that it would probably be unreasonable to expect a pupil *never* to call out without raising their hand. The importance of using systematic observation is reinforced by the finding that once teachers are concerned about the disruptive behavior of particular students they will tend to overestimate its frequency. By collecting observations on a regular basis it is possible to obtain an indication of the success of interventions designed to reduce problem behavior and increase positive behavior. Scherer (1990) provides a clear and practical account of how this process of 'assessment by baselines' can be used by subject teachers in secondary schools to count and graph the number of disruptive incidents occurring with particular students while a series of intervention strategies are tried.

Event sampling involves recording each occurrence of a specified behavior during a particular time period. For example, you might want a record of each time a pupil complies or fails to comply with a request from the teacher. This approach can be used whether or not a behavior occurs frequently, and it is possible to collect information on other students at the same time. Provided the number of behaviors and students to be observed is kept to a manageable number (and this will depend on the frequency of occurrence of the behavior) this is a highly feasible approach for ongoing use by staff and students. Observations collected across different sessions may help to identify certain lessons or times of day the students find difficult and inform action planning.

Event sampling may also provide information about the environmental events surrounding the behavior of concern. An 'ABC' outline is frequently used where the observer records:

A. antecedent events that precede the pupil's behavior (e.g. 'teacher asks pupil to begin work');
B. behavior engaged in by the pupil on that occasion (e.g pupil shouts and swears at teacher);
C. consequences for the pupil that result from the behavior (e.g. pupil is sent out of class to the head of year).

One problem with observational approaches is that both children and the adults interacting with them may behave differently when being observed or when asked to carry out self-recording. If

only a limited number of lessons are being observed a further concern is that these may not be representative and conclusions may be drawn that will not apply more generally.

Documentary sources such as report cards, records of attendance, detentions or other sanctions can be useful where they are sufficiently specific about the behavior concerned. These sources can also be useful for monitoring the success of interventions over longer periods than is usually feasible with direct observations.

A wide variety of *questionnaires, checklists and rating scales* are available which provide behavioral descriptors on which key informants can rate a particular child. The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (Goodman 1997) is a measure of adjustment and EBDS in 3–16 year olds which is increasingly widely used. It consists of five scales (of five items each): Emotional Symptoms Scale; Conduct Problems Scale; Hyperactivity Scale; Peer Problems Scale; and Prosocial Scale. Parallel versions are available for completion by teachers, parents/caregiver and children/young people. The applicability of items over the last six months to the child in question is rated using a 3-point scale: 'not true', 'somewhat true' or 'certainly true'. The questionnaires and scoring instructions are available free on the web (http://www.sdqinfo.com) for all these informants in a large number of languages. The teacher and parent versions have been found to produce results consistent with established behavior rating scales, such as Achenbach's Child Behavior Checklist and Rutter's Child Behavior Rating Scale (Goodman 1999), and with psychiatric diagnoses (Goodman 2001). Although the self-report version was originally designed for young people aged 11–16, there is evidence that it is applicable from 8 years (Muris *et al.* 2004).

4.2.2. **Cognitively-based methods**

A variety of questionnaires and other techniques are available for use with students to assess particular cognitive constructs, such as self-perception (see Burden 1999), attributions (see Indoe 1999) and personal constructs (see Beaver 1996; Ravenette 1999). For example, the Self-Perception Profile for Children (Harter 1985) is a paper-and-pencil questionnaire which was developed to assess the self-perception of children aged 8–14 years. It includes 36 items and covers five specific domains of competence: scholastic competence (assessing how clever the

children think they are, how well they believe they are performing at school); social acceptance (assessing how popular the children feel they are and if they believe they have a lot of friends); athletic competence (assessing the children's perception of their athletic ability); physical appearance (assessing how attractive the children feel they are); and behavioral conduct (assessing how well the children feel they behave and if they like the way they behave). In addition, there is a global self-worth subscale, which assesses the extent to which children like themselves as people. For each item there are two statements which the child reads, or which can be read to them, 'Some children often do not like the way they behave *but* other children usually like the way they behave'. The child is first asked to decide which statement is most like him/her. Then the child is asked to decide if the statement selected is 'really true' or 'sort of true' for him/her. These responses are scored from 1 to 4, where a score of 1 indicates low perceived competence and a score of 4 indicates high perceived competence.

As Gibbs and Huang (1989) point out, cultural groups may differ in the value attached to the different characteristics and abilities that become the sources of self-concept and self-esteem for the child. They highlight the importance of finding out about these differential values in order to properly interpret a pupil's criteria for self-evaluation. In this respect an advantage of the Harter measure is that an additional questionnaire is provided where the pupil rates the importance they attach to competence in each of the areas where self-perception is assessed. Children's priorities in self-evaluation are likely to change over time. These developmental changes may occur not only because of increasing psychological maturity but also when their personal circumstances change. This is perhaps seen most dramatically with those refugee children who have been exposed to traumatic life events before their migration (Hodes 2000).

One problem with self-report scales for children is that there is often a tendency for children to select the most socially desirable option, even if it is not really true for them. The structure of the Harter questionnaire attempts to overcome this by suggesting that each statement is chosen by some children and that both are therefore acceptable. Other questionnaires tackle the problem in a different way by including a 'social desirability' scale containing items such as 'I always tell the truth' and 'I am never unhappy'. That is a way of checking if the person completing the questionnaire is trying to give a good impression. The problem is that it does not eliminate the

effects of that distortion from the other scales and the type of approach used by the Harter questionnaire is usually preferred.

Other problems sometimes encountered with pupil self-report scales relate to the pupil's understanding of the language used, and their perceptiveness and capacity for self-analysis. Approaches such as those based on personal construct psychology generally lack the data on reliability typically provided with standardized questionnaires. However, they offer some relative advantages in that they use the child's own language and ways of categorizing their experience. This may be of particular value in the case of children whose cultural experience differs from that of the scale's authors. For further information about these techniques, see Stoker and Walker (1996) and Ravenette (1997).

4.2.3. Psycho-dynamically-based methods

An individual interview is central to most psychodynamic approaches, sometimes deriving support from the use of projective techniques. The projective hypothesis is based on the assumption that when we respond to something outside ourselves our reactions are partly a reflection of our private inner world. When interviewers employ a projective technique they generally seek open-ended responses to stimuli designed to evoke inner conflicts of interest. For example, the Children's Apperception Test (Bellak and Bellak 1949) consists of black and white pictures of 'adult' and 'child' animals depicting scenes relating to various aspects of family life, such as food and mealtimes, toileting and bedtime. The child is asked to tell a story about each picture and their stories are interpreted as a projection of their inner conflicts. A child's perceptions of relationships within their family may be explored using a kinetic family drawing (Burns and Kaufman 1970). Children are asked to draw a picture showing themselves and everyone who lives at home with them in their family. Inferences about children's perceptions of their role in the family may be drawn on the basis, for example, of where they locate themselves in the picture or how large they draw themselves in relation to other family members.

One criticism of early uses of projective techniques was that insufficient attention was given to testing out in other ways the interpretations generated. It has been argued that the techniques may offer an interesting source of hypotheses but these should not be accepted at face value. A further

criticism is that the assessment information provided has only very limited applicability in generating practical intervention strategies for use in schools. On the other hand, these techniques may sometimes highlight an aspect of a child's problems that is otherwise likely to be ignored. The case study of Lesley (see Activity 15.3) illustrates this point. She completed another form of projective technique – a sentence completion task. In this method the child is presented with a series of sentence stems and asked to complete each sentence with the first words they think of. They are encouraged to work quickly and sometimes, if they do not write fluently themselves, dictate their responses to the interviewer. That is what Lesley did, as she had difficulty with all forms of literacy.

4.2.4. Systemically-based methods

Systemic assessment methods may be used to collate different perceptions about either organizational- or individual-level issues (see Chapter 9 for more information about the use of one such approach – soft systems methodology). At the organizational level, information about school rules and sanctions will generally be given in the school brochure. However, interviews with students, teachers and parents will often be necessary to identify the ways in which these rules and sanctions are perceived to operate in practice by different individuals. At the individual level, different perceptions of the behavior of a particular pupil, perhaps collected by means of a round robin of their secondary school teachers, may be a starting point for identifying combinations of factors that are especially problematic for the pupil and those factors that are more successful in supporting appropriate behavior.

The importance of the peer group social system in either supporting or undermining appropriate behavior has also been recognized. Sociometric assessment questionnaires collect information from classmates (see Chapter 16) about the child's level of acceptance or rejection in the peer group. More recent questionnaires for monitoring bullying behavior in school collect information from students not just about engagement in bullying or experience of victimization, but also about the range of roles that other members of the peer group play in relation to bullying incidents, roles such as assistant of the bully, defender of the victim and outsider (see Sharp 1999). Because of the hidden nature of much bullying, assessment approaches such as this are

very important in assisting head teachers to discharge their legal duty to introduce measures to prevent all forms of bullying (School Standards and Frameworks Act 1998).

Systemic assessment approaches typically collect information at a number of levels and may use cognitive or behavioral assessment strategies to do so. Information is also collected about interactions between different levels and different individuals' perceptions. Techniques such as 'circular questioning' may be used to obtain information about relationships and differences in the perceptions of students, parents and teachers. Each person present may be asked to consider the thoughts, feelings and behavior of the others and ways in which they may interact. For example, each person might be asked to choose, and give reasons for their choice of, the person who would be most pleased and the person who would be most disappointed if the pupil suddenly stopped presenting behavioral difficulties. Dowling and Osborne (1994: 23) point out that this style of questioning is 'intended to explore connections and effects rather than look for causes of behavior' and makes 'it possible for the participants in the interview to develop a different view of the situation'.

'Reframing' involves putting forward an alternative interpretation of a situation. The use of circular questioning can indirectly lead participants to reframe events. Reframing may also be used directly to try out different possible interpretations of events that may enable all involved to shift their positions slightly and agree on action to move the situation on. For example, more opportunities for constructive action are likely to result if a parent's angry refusal to support a school's homework policy can be reframed as strong concern for their child's progress and worry that the child may be disadvantaged if the parent is unable to help them. It is generally possible to challenge some constructions of events because they are inconsistent with aspects of the information that is available.

Usually however, a number of alternative constructions of events are plausible so several 'reframes' are possible. This may be particularly important to acknowledge where different constructions of events relate to cultural differences. Ultimately we can only evaluate the success of this kind of systems analysis by asking whether it leads to improved outcomes, and this generally involves collecting data at the behavioral level.

Summary

Each of the commonly used assessment methods reviewed above has particular strengths, weaknesses and potential sources of bias. Greater confidence can be placed in conclusions reached when the results of different methods point in the same direction. This may be particularly important for students from certain cultural groups. Gray and Noakes (1994) stress the importance of checking out the accuracy of all information. For example, school staff may make inferences about the reasons for frequent family moves which become accepted within the school as fact. It is important to ask 'How do we know this?', 'How much reliance can we place on this source of information?' and 'Do we have supporting information from other sources?'

Given the identified importance of a multi-level systemic approach and an integrative orientation, the IF framework offers a means of representing assessment information about a particular pupil and their situation that has been collected using different assessment methods. The framework can accommodate a wide range of types of assessment information, irrespective of the theoretical perspectives employed. The framework can also be used to model the hypothesized effects of intervention strategies. Where problem behavior is thought to be maintained by a number of interacting factors, it generally follows that a multi-pronged intervention approach will be required. This is a conclusion which emerges strongly from the following review of commonly-used intervention approaches for problem behavior in schools.

4.3. Intervention strategies for EBDs

Definition of intervention

What is intervention in special needs/inclusive education?

Intervention in special needs/inclusive education refers to the different mechanisms/methods designed to support or solve/minimized the problems/ barriers students with special needs faced. It is the third stage in the practice of inclusive/special needs education.

The three interrelated and inseparable procedures in the practice of inclusive/special needs education are:

Theoretical perspectives on Intervention strategies for EBDs

The intervention strategies for EBDS that are most commonly used in schools are drawn from behavioral, cognitive and systemic theories. Table 15.4 shows the frequency with which different types of strategies for students with EBDS were recommended or implemented by educational psychologists in one county in a single term. A diverse range of strategies were also reported to have been employed by the multi-agency behavior and education support teams formed in local authorities as part of behavior improvement projects in areas where there were high crime rates: There were positive examples of case study work with individual children and their families, of the outcome of anger management groups, Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for school staff, changes in school policies, approaches to thinking about behavior, and transition work (Hallam 2007: 109).

Table 3 Type of strategy recommended by educational psychologists

Strategy
Behavioral Based on behavioral approaches with the aim of increasing desirable behavior and/or decreasing undesirable behavior: ✓ Behavioral management work with school staff/involving pupil ✓ Family work on behavioral programs with parent

Cognitive

Based on a cognitive model addressing a child's problem-solving skills, poor self-image etc. For example:

- ✓ Social problem solving and skills training (see Chapter 16)
- ✓ Anger management – a set of approaches which helps clients analyze events that trigger anger for them, identify yearly signs in themselves, remain calm, think differently about the triggers, develop impulse control, learn adaptive strategies for expressing anger in an effective way (see Faupel *et al.* 1998)
- ✓ Counseling – a collaboration between a helper and a client where clients, 'through client–helper interactions, are in better positions to manage their problem situations and/or develop the unused resources and opportunities of their lives more effectively' (Egan 1994: 5)
- ✓ Brief solution-focused therapy – consists of finding out where clients want to get to and helping them appreciate and build on what they are already doing which is likely to help them get there. The emphasis is on working towards solutions rather than exploring problems, and on helping clients find their own solutions or routes to their goals (see Rhodes and Ajmal 1995; Ajmal and Rees 2001)

Systemic

Focusing on contextual interactions within the classroom (teacher and peer group), within the school at different levels, concerning home–school links, within the family/home environment. For example:

- ✓ Circle of Friends – this approach attempts to support children who present EBDS and other SEN by enlisting the help of the other students in their class and setting up a special group or 'circle' of friends. The special group helps to set, monitor and review weekly targets in a meeting facilitated by an adult. Group members also provide agreed support to facilitate the focus child's inclusion and to help them achieve their targets (see Newton *et al.* 1996; Frederickson and Turner, 2003)
- ✓ Family systems work – this is a model for working jointly with both families and

schools which draws on applications of systems theory to the fields of family therapy and consultative work in schools (see Dowling and Osborne 1994)

- ✓ Conferencing with staff – this involves group consultation with teachers where the consultant acts as a non-directive interventionist who generates valid information that highlights the underlying issues; enables the teacher to make autonomous free and informed choices about the nature of the intervention; and fosters a climate of commitment to its implementation (see Hanko 2001)

In order to compile Table 2, educational psychologists were first asked to identify all the strategies they had recommended in the past term and then to indicate the frequency (high, medium or low) with which each strategy had been recommended. It can be seen that behavioral strategies were the most frequently used, with almost half the psychologists reporting at least medium frequency of use. The use of behavioral strategies was reported about three times more often in primary than secondary schools, while counseling and other cognitive interventions were more frequently implemented in secondary schools. This is consistent with the finding of a national survey of educational psychologists' work which reported that counseling and therapeutic work in relation to behavior had been provided in 50 per cent of secondary schools in the year of the survey but in only 15 per cent of primary schools (DfEE 2000b). A predominance of interventions based on behavioral and cognitive behavioral approaches were also apparent in the systematic review of effective strategies to support students with EBDS in mainstream primary schools conducted by Evans *et al.* (2004).

Systematic reviews apply stringent quality criteria in excluding studies which have weaknesses in design or execution, and the first conclusion reached in this review was that there was a dearth of good-quality research. The other conclusions of the review will be reported below.

4.3.1 Behavioral strategies

A brief outline of the range of behavioral strategies commonly used with students who present EBDS is provided below. The reader is referred to Ayers *et al.* (2000) and Farrell (2006) for more detailed accounts.

Strategies aimed at increasing desirable behavior include:

Positive reinforcement: This is something which is given following the desirable behavior and which increases the occurrence of the behavior in future. For many students an opportunity to use the computer upon finishing their work would be an effective tangible reinforcer, while for most students a quiet word of praise from the teacher is an important social reinforcer. Houghton *et al*. (1988) found that a complimentary letter home to parents was regarded even by secondary students as a significant incentive. However, different things are experienced positively by different students. So it is advisable to consult the pupil concerned and to monitor the frequency of the desirable behavior being targeted to ensure that it actually does increase.

Negative reinforcement: This is something that increases a pupil's behavior if it is removed as a result of the behavior. Apologizing for disruptive behavior is likely to be negatively reinforced by the lessening of teacher displeasure. While positive reinforcement is more commonly and appropriately used, teachers should be aware of ways in which they may unwittingly use negative reinforcement with the effect of increasing undesirable behavior. For example, this may happen when a teacher removes or reduces work requirements because the pupil complains about them.

Strategies aimed at reducing undesirable behavior include:

Extinction: This involves withdrawing reinforcement from an undesirable behavior. For example, the teacher may decide to withdraw their attention and start ignoring students who shout out answers instead of raising their hands.

Time out: This involves removing the pupil for a brief period from all sources of reinforcement. There may be a chair in a screened-off section of the classroom or the pupil may be sent out of the classroom to a specially designated place supervised by a senior member of staff. This may be necessary when the disruptive behavior is reinforced by other students or is behavior which cannot be reasonably or safely ignored by the teacher.

***Punishment*:** For most students teacher reprimands or detentions are a form of punishment. One of the problems with punishments are the negative emotions that they often arouse. Unless

carefully handled, there is the risk that they may damage the pupil–teacher relationship and make the teacher a less potent source of positive reinforcement and motivation for the pupil in future. These risks can be minimized by ensuring that the ‘rules’ relating to the use of punishments or sanctions are well known to all students, that they are applied consistently and in a way that is seen to be fair, and that they are administered in a calm and unemotional way by the teacher.

A problem with all approaches to reducing undesirable behavior is that if they are used on their own there is no guarantee that the students will learn what they should be doing instead. It is important, therefore, that they are only used in combination with approaches to increase the desirable behavior that is wanted instead.

Behavioral techniques can be used with groups or whole classes as well as individuals, and Merrett and Houghton (1989) reported a number of studies carried out in the UK in which they have been successfully implemented in secondary schools in a wide variety of interesting ways. For example, some studies have used novel game-type formats and some have utilized pupil self-recording.

In their systematic review of strategies for which there was good evidence of effectiveness in primary schools, Evans *et al.* (2004: 7) report: Behavioral strategies using token systems for delivering rewards and sanctions to either the whole class or individuals within a whole class are effective for reducing behavior which is disruptive to children’s own or others’ learning in the mainstream classroom. Positive effects are immediate and restricted to the period of intervention delivery. Such strategies should attempt to incorporate some element of peer support and pressure.

Examples of the rewards for on-task and non-disruptive behavior used in these studies were minutes of free time for play (either alone or with chosen peers) or listening to music. Off-task and disruptive behavior typically led to loss of rewards. Graphs or symbols (e.g., smiley faces, ribbons) were used to chart progress towards receiving a reward. It is important to bear in mind that a particular pupil’s reactions to a particular reinforcer will depend on their previous experience. Teachers and other professionals should be cautious in making assumptions about what will constitute reinforcement for an individual pupil. This is particularly so when the

pupil’s background or culture differs from their own. From a behavioral perspective, problem students may be thought of as those for whom the reinforcers normally used in the school are less effective for whatever reason or who have more difficulty in learning the associations between their behavior and the events that follow as consequences. In identifying a more personalized approach for these students behavioral contracts are often negotiated, sometimes involving parents/caregiver and other professionals as well. They specify clearly what everyone will and will not do, and identify specific consequences that make success more likely for the individual pupil. Figure 15.6 shows an example of a contract for Carl.

In negotiating a behavioral contract it is important that everyone has a say in it and develops a commitment to it, recognizing that it will probably not be possible to get everything right at once and that some aspects may need to be renegotiated at the review meetings which are written into the contract. Similarly, the behaviors identified for the pupil need to be realistic and achievable. Where a pupil needs to make significant changes to their behavior these will probably have to be achieved on a step-by-step basis over a number of contracts, each being reviewed after two to three weeks. When a satisfactory level of behavior has been achieved it is important that the additional supports that have been put in place are phased out gradually. This will enable the need for any ongoing level of support to be accurately identified.

DfEE (1999a) introduced ‘pupil support programs’ which are school based interventions for students who do not respond adequately to the approaches generally employed in school to combat disaffection and who are therefore likely to be at risk of exclusion. They share a number of features with the behavioral contracting approach reviewed above: ‘The program should set targets broken down into fortnightly tasks. It should identify the rewards that can be achieved for meeting the targets and the sanctions that will apply if certain behavior occurs’ (DfEE 1999a: 29). In addition to involving parents, schools are encouraged to involve other relevant agencies including voluntary agencies and ethnic minority community groups, who may be able to support schools with mentoring programs as well as offering advice and guidance.

At the whole-school level behavioral approaches have informed the development of behavior policies, involving the specification of consistent expectations and reinforcement of these with recognition systems and sanctions. Some schools have supported this by introducing structured

whole-school behavioral programs such as ‘assertive discipline’ (Canter and Canter 1992). The focus is on making classroom rules and procedures clear and following through with associated rewards and sanctions. Nicholls and Houghton (1995) have shown that for some classes at least the introduction of assertive discipline can result in an increase in on-task behavior and a decrease in the frequency of disruptive behavior. However, assertive discipline is one of the behavioral strategies identified by Evans *et al.* (2004) as requiring further evaluation, along with daily report cards and training teachers to use praise.

4.3.2. Cognitive strategies

Cognitive strategies may be used to help children change their self-perceptions, the ways in which they attribute meaning to events in their environment or their ability to think and solve problems effectively about the situations they encounter. Some of the approaches listed in Table 15.4, such as counseling and solution focused therapy, require the development of an extended repertoire of skills, discussion of which is outside the scope of this book. Elliott and Place (1998) point out that counseling and solution-focused approaches are generally based on the premise that the pupil recognizes that they have a problem and wish to work with another to seek a solution. This may not necessarily be true where the disruptive behavior is serving other purposes, such as securing status in the peer group.

Hence, the appropriateness of these approaches to a particular situation requires careful consideration. For detailed consideration of the application of these approaches in schools readers are referred to Rhodes and Ajmal (1995) and Ajmal and Rees (2001) in the case of solution-focused work, while in the case of counseling skills and approaches Cowie and Pecherek (1994) and Hornby (2003) are recommended for further reading.

Anger management, self-instruction training and social skills training all receive some support from the rigorous review of research evidence for effective strategies for primary school students conducted by Evans *et al.* (2004). In the rest of this section we consider an area that has become controversial in recent years –strategies used to enhance children’s self-esteem – defined as ‘how much individuals value themselves as a person’ (Harter 2006: 314). Three types of approach to improving self-esteem were identified by Beane (1991):

- ✓ personal development activities such as individually focused self-esteem courses;
- ✓ curriculum programs that focus directly on improving self-esteem;
- ✓ structural changes in schools that place greater emphasis on cooperation, student participation, community involvement and ethnic pride.

Beane (1991) argued that the third of these elements is crucial. He queried the relevance of interventions which are exclusively focused at the individual level and ignore 'the fact that having positive self-esteem is almost impossible for many young people, given the deplorable conditions under which they are forced to live by the inequities in our society' (Beane 1991: 27). Covington (1989) summarized research showing that programs designed to promote self-esteem at an individual level alone, by making students feel better about themselves, are unlikely to improve academic outcomes. Such findings have readily been picked up by the media in articles such as 'Education: doing bad and feeling good' (Krauthammer 1990).

Returning to the three types of approach for improving self-esteem, Beane (1991: 29) was a little more positive about curriculum programs: 'there is a place for some direct instruction regarding affective matters, but this is not enough either'. In England and Wales, approaches utilizing the curriculum became more formalized following the introduction of the national framework for personal, social and health education and citizenship (DfEE/QCA 1999a, 1999b). Key components of self-esteem are included, although not as isolated components, but tied in with areas of achievement – for example, it is recommended that students should be taught:

- ✓ to think about themselves, learn from their experiences and recognize what they are good at (Key Stage 1);
- ✓ to recognize their worth as individuals by identifying positive things about themselves and their achievements, seeing their mistakes, making amends and setting personal goals (Key Stage 2);
- ✓ to reflect on and assess their strengths in relation to personality, work and leisure (Key Stage 3);
- ✓ to be aware of and assess their personal qualities, skills, achievements and potential, so that they can set personal goals (Key Stage 4).

Kahne (1996) agreed with the importance of a structural focus at the level of the school and classroom and argued that major threats to self-esteem are the narrow range of competencies that are valued in many schools and the focus on competition, where students make external comparisons of their achievements with those of other students. Attempting to boost self-esteem at an individual level through positive, affirming feedback might be unlikely to have a long-term impact on a pupil who has SEN in a school context where recognition and rewards focus on the highest levels of achievement, with effort or relative improvement being recognized in a more marginal or tokenistic way.

This has become an increasingly important issue as more students who have SEN have been included in mainstream classes. Renick and Harter (1989) found that students with learning difficulties who were included in mainstream classes tended to have lower academic self-esteem than those who were educated in separate special classes, while self-esteem in other areas (e.g. social, physical) did not show a difference across placements. However, they account for this finding by referring to social comparison theory, hypothesizing that individuals do not employ absolute standards in evaluating their own performance, but engage in a process of comparing their performance with an available reference group. In the case of the included students they appeared to be basing their self-evaluations on the performance of their mainstream peers, whose academic achievement was considerably higher. As an alternative to social comparison theory it could be argued that the special class students might have their self-esteem boosted by being in a selected special group. Students who are withdrawn to participate in special programs for gifted students provide a test of these different explanations. In support of a social comparison theory interpretation, Marsh *et al.* (1995) found that such students tended to show declines in academic self-esteem compared to similar students who remained in mainstream classes, although self-esteem in other areas did not change.

Harter (2006) has reported that self-worth can also vary in different relationship contexts; for example, some adolescents may appraise self-worth positively in relationships with peers but not parents. The level of self-worth in a relationship context was strongly related to the level of approval in that context. It would seem therefore that an integrative focus on both individual- and organizational level factors and strategies will be important in raising students' self-esteem, or at least in ensuring that school practices do not undermine the self-worth of diverse students.

Woolfolk (2004) reviews a range of strategies supported by research that can be used to develop children's self-esteem. All of these relate to Beane's (1991) structural level in that they apply to students generally and would be appropriate to include in a school's behavior policy for implementation within and across classrooms. However, a number of the strategies are also particularly applicable at the individual level in that they could be individualized for use with a particular student as part of an IEP. In Activity 15.4 you are asked to consider the applicability of these strategies in a school with which you are familiar and to identify those which appear particularly appropriate for use with individual students who are presenting EBDS.

Developing self-esteem

Listed below is a range of strategies (from Woolfolk 2004: 75) which are supported by research and can be used to develop children's self-esteem.

A. Consider the applicability of each of these strategies in a school with which you are familiar.
B. Identify those which would appear particularly appropriate for use with individual students where low self-esteem has been identified as a significant influence on the EBDS they are presenting.

1. Value and accept all students for their attempts as well as their accomplishments.
2. Create a climate that is physically and psychologically safe for students.
3. Make sure that your procedures for teaching and grouping students are really necessary, not just a convenient way of handling problem students or avoiding contact with some students.
4. Make standards of evaluation clear and help students learn to evaluate their own accomplishments.
5. Model appropriate methods of self-criticism, perseverance and self-reward.
6. Avoid destructive comparisons and competition; encourage students to compete with their own prior levels of achievement.
7. Accept a student even when you must reject a particular behavior or outcome. Students should feel confident, for example, that failing a test or being reprimanded in class does not make them 'bad' people.

8. Remember that positive self-concept grows from success in operating in the world and from being valued by important people in the environment.
9. Encourage students to take responsibility for their reactions to events; show them that they have choices in how to respond.
10. Set up support groups or 'study buddies' in school and teach students how to encourage each other.
11. Help students set clear goals and objectives; brainstorm about resources they have for reaching their goals.
12. Highlight the value of different ethnic groups, their cultures and accomplishments.

4.3.3. Strategies derived from psychodynamic theory

School-based strategies derived from psychodynamic theory can be illustrated with the example of nurture groups.

Nurture groups

The importance of secure and trusting relationships with adults in attachment theory has provided the basis for the development of nurture groups (Bennathan and Boxall 2000). These groups are designed to meet the needs of children who are seen as having missed crucial preschool experiences of adequate and attentive early nurturing care needed to build a secure base from which they can explore the world with confidence and relate to others in an autonomous but caring manner.

Early nurture is a many-stranded, intermeshing, forward-moving, unitary learning process that centers on attachment and trust and has its foundations in the close identification of parent and child, and the interaction and participation in shared experiences that stem from this. It is the first stage of a developmental process through which the child builds up adequate concepts and skills, learns to interact and share with others and feel concern for them (Bennathan and Boxall 2000: 23)

'Nurture groups' were originally developed as small special classes in primary schools of up to 12 children with a teacher and a special support assistant. Students do not normally attend for

more than four terms. The aim is to provide ‘a structured and predictable environment in which the children can begin to trust adults and to learn’ (DfEE 1997: 80). The nurture group team of a teacher and a special support assistant attempt to recreate the processes of adequate parenting within school. Creating a classroom setting in which elements of ‘home’ and ‘school’ interact is intended to give children the opportunity to go through the early learning experiences they may have missed. In the home area of the classroom there is ‘food, comfort, consistent care and support, and close physical contact seen in cradling, rocking, sensory exploration and communication by touch’ (Bennathan and Boxall 2000: 23).

Early basic experiences are offered within clear structures and routines that the teacher and assistant control. In contrast to the mainstream classroom, activities are taken slowly with a much greater emphasis on repetition, order and routine than is necessary for most children of this age. In contrast to the homes of the majority of children in the groups, strategies for managing their often uncontrolled behavior emphasize consistency and clarity, as is needed by a younger child. Through these means it is intended that the child’s experiences in the group will establish ‘growth-promoting patterns’ which were not encouraged in their earlier lives. Lucas *et al.* (2006) offer detailed practical guidance on the operation of nurture groups, following the principles established by Boxall.

Evidence of effectiveness for nurture groups has been limited by the design of the evaluation studies conducted to date. Holmes (1995) reported follow-up information on over 200 children who had attended nurture groups in London: 71 per cent had transferred to mainstream class without difficulty, while 17 percent had transferred with additional support. The remaining 12 per cent transferred to special educational provision. O’Connor and Colwell (2002) followed 68 children who had attended nurture groups in Enfield, and reported significant improvements over three terms on the Boxall developmental diagnostic profile, albeit completed by the nurture group teachers.

While these results appear encouraging, in the absence of well-matched comparison groups it is possible that many of these young children would have improved anyway as they became accustomed to the school context. Iszatt and Wasilewska (1997) offered some comparison data at a school level. They reported that more than four out of five children entering nurture groups in

the London Borough of Enfield returned to their mainstream classes after an average stay in a nurture group of just three terms. In two comparable schools where nurture group provision was not available the proportion of children requiring statutory assessments and special provision was almost three times greater, and 'the proportion of students requiring EBDS school provision was almost seven times greater' (Iszatt and Wasilewska 1997: 69). From a pilot of the approach in Glasgow, Gerrard (2005) reported that 100 out of 108 children attending nurture groups showed significantly improved scores on the Boxall profile and 110 out of 133 showed significantly improved scores on the Goodman (1997) Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ). Two comparison schools provided data for 11 children, none of whose scores showed significant improvements over the course of the study. Gerrard acknowledges the limitations of these comparison data and recommends that they be addressed in future studies.

Cooper *et al.* (2001) reported preliminary findings from an evaluation study which was comparing the progress of 216 children with EBDS attending 'nurture groups' with that of two comparison groups from mainstream classrooms in the nurture group schools. The first comparison group consisted of 64 children matched with the nurture group students for age, gender, educational attainment and level of EBDS, while the second group consisted of 62 children who were also matched for age and gender with the nurture group children but did not have emotional and behavioral difficulties. It is not clear from the preliminary report how the children with EBDS were selected for or excluded from the nurture group nor how the matching was carried out. Mainstream class teachers' ratings of the children at the start and end of the year, using the SDQ, showed that while both groups of children with SEBD improved, significantly greater improvements were found for those attending nurture groups. The proportion of children in the nurture groups in the abnormal or borderline range on the SDQ decreased from 92% to 63%, while the proportion of matched mainstream students with SEBD decreased from 85% to 75%. So results to date appear promising, although convincing evidence of the effectiveness of nurture groups is still awaited (Evans *et al.* 2004).

4.3.4. Systemic approaches to intervention and combating bullying

Systemic approaches are increasingly advocated by both researchers and practitioners. Reid (1993) reported that most of the more promising interventions for children who display antisocial behavior focused on the *social interactional fabric* in which the child's behavior problems were embedded, dealing with the *behavior* itself, the *social environment's reaction* to that behavior, *social cognitions*, and/or *skills*. Bear (1998) concluded from a review of the literature that effective teachers can be characterized by their integrated use of three sets of strategies:

- ✓ classroom management and positive climate strategies for preventing behavior problems;
- ✓ operant learning strategies for the short-term management and control of behavior problems;
- ✓ decision-making and social problem-solving strategies for achieving the long term goal of self-discipline.

In an evaluation of projects supported under the Standards Fund category 'Truancy, Disruptive and Disaffected Students', Hallam and Castle (1999) reported that projects successful in reducing exclusions incorporated three levels of intervention: whole-school development work, class-based work and work with individual students. Elliott and Place (1998) argued that a whole-school behavior policy is unlikely to be sufficient for children who present particularly challenging behavior. In these cases it is likely that additional measures will be needed, such as: an analysis of interpersonal interactions at home and school; consideration of behavioral approaches; and analysis of the suitability of the educational tasks with which the child is being presented. It is argued that intervention should operate at all three levels and there are examples of programs such as 'Building a Better Behaved School' (Galvin *et al.* 1990) where classroom management approaches and behavioral approaches for managing the most disruptive students are considered as part of a comprehensive whole-school approach.

The 'Framework for Intervention' has been developed as a systemic approach based on the understanding that 'problems in behavior in educational settings are usually a product of complex interaction between the individual, school, family, community and wider society' (Daniels and Williams 2000: 222). The Framework offers an approach for tackling behavior

problems at a series of levels analogous to the stages of the *Code of Practice*. However, at level 1, rather than developing individual programs, intervention is focused on addressing environmental factors in the classroom and school by developing behavior environment plans. The power of this approach is illustrated in the systematic review of effective strategies for EBDS in primary schools conducted by Evans *et al.* (2004) which reported that changes in the seating arrangements in classrooms from groups to rows had a positive impact on time on task, in particular for the most easily distracted students. In the Framework for Intervention at levels 2, 3 and beyond, individual behavior plans are introduced in addition to, not instead of, the behavior environment plans which continue.