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The Success Story of Strategies Incorporated in One
Alternative School for the Success of Special Education Students

by

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Abstract

Every student is capable of learning. Students on the Autism Spectrum or students with other development disabilities may not be able to have all of their needs met in a traditional educational setting. Once a student is placed in an alternative setting where they feel safe, the learning is expedited. Students may be placed in an alternative setting for various reasons. They may be displaying behaviors that are impeding the learning of themselves or other classmates. These behaviors may be directly linked to their difficulty in the areas of communication and social skills. Once the students are taught communication and social skills and how to manage situations where they may feel anxious, they are able to attend to academic instruction and make strides in their academic achievement. Therefore, the purpose of this project is to create a brochure for a corporation that is helping students to reach their goals by teaching them communication and social skills through enrichment programs offered by one alternative school for the success of all students both now and in the future.

Keywords: alternative educational setting, Autism Spectrum Disorder, behavior, communication, developmental disabilities, social skills.

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Chapter 1

Introduction and Rationale

Learning is a life-long process and our education is the most important aspect of our life. Having a positive experience is extremely vital to the success of our future. I will be describing my life experiences and this will lead you to understand why teaching has engulfed my life and how these experiences have led to the development of this Master's degree project, a brochure for a non-public alternative school for students with special needs. This chapter includes my life experiences, statement of the problem, purpose of the project, guiding questions, literature review, methodology preview, significance of the project, and definition of terms.

Alternative schools play an important role in educating children who have not been successful in a traditional learning environment. The alternative school described in this project provides a team teaching approach with a focus on enrichment programs. Team teaching and building a rapport with all of your coworkers, parents, and students is essential to creating a positive learning environment where all students can thrive. The enrichment programs offered through the school can be crucial piece in teaching your students skills that will help them be successful not only in the classroom, but in all aspects of their lives. Enrichment programs are an essential accompaniment to the core curriculum in all schools because they provide unique opportunities students may not otherwise experience.

Setting the Context: My Life Experiences

I have always loved children and would play school when I was a little girl. Through my grade school years and entering into high school, the academic aspect of my education became more and more difficult for me and I struggled to graduate from high school. Now that I am an adult and also work as a school teacher, I have tried to piece together and make sense of what

exactly happened or I should say didn't happen during my educational process and why school was so difficult for me.

Regardless, I truly believe that everything happens for a reason. The fall after graduating from high school, my well-intended father marched me down to and enrolled me in the local 4-year college, even though I told him I was not ready. Trying very hard to be the best daughter I could be, I stuck it out one semester before deciding to enlist in the United States Marine Corps (USMC). The military is where I learned self-discipline and how to be an effective leader. I was able to earn my Bachelor's Degree in Psychology while serving just over nine years on active duty. This is where I discovered what type of learner I was and this helped me to better understand my studying habits which then led me to become a better student and eventually graduating with honors.

The real turning point in my life was the birth of my son when I was 20 years of age. In raising him, I wanted to lead from the front as I did in the military. I wanted him to go to college not because I said so, but because I set a positive example for him to follow, one that did not require words. This is also the reason why there are almost eight years between my son and daughter, as I promised myself that I would not bring another child into this world until I finished my degree.

My favorite part of being a teacher is that I am the same person at home with my kids that I am at work with my students, unlike my time in the military. My son told me once, "Your expectations are too high for us." I explained to him that it is my job as a parent to have high expectations for him and give him the tools he needed to meet those expectations. I would be failing him if I didn't. I also reminded him that I have never asked him to do something that I myself have not done already.

I apply this same theory for the success to the students in my classroom. As they tell me how hard school is, I remind my students how tough life can be especially if you do not finish your education. This is no excuse. They are the only ones that have the ability to make a difference as they are ones in charge of their lives and their futures. They are the only ones who can choose to make their lives better different if they want to and I am here to help them, to guide them, to facilitate their learning.

It is a combination of all of these life experiences that have made me the understanding teacher I am today. As I reflect on the word “understanding,” it just seems too simple. I decided to see what post a status on my Facebook account asking family and friends to help find another word and here are some of the responses I received were: awesome, spunky, unique, amazing, classic, compelling, engaging, active, challenging, interactive, creative, aware, involved, motivating, innovative, inspiring, perseverant, prepared, firm, fair, learn-yearful, caring, dedicated, diligent, and exemplary.

As I look at the words that I was given, I am reminded and realized that one word would never be enough. A great teacher must display all of these characteristics to be successful. It also reminds me that it takes a village to raise a child and I am thankful to have family and friends as part of my village. This is why I am so drawn to the students in special education and I truly believe and love the idea of the nonpublic school setting in order make all students successful. Ultimately, teachers and parents alike want their students to be productive members of society and help them become as independent as possible.

Statement of the Problem

The demand for alternative schools is on the rise (Lehr & Lange, 2003; Lehr, Tan, & Ysseldyke, 2009). They have arisen because not all students have thrived in a traditional regular

classroom education setting. Several factors such as suspension and expulsion, teenage pregnancies, and behavior problems can play a part in the decision for a student to be placed in an alternative setting. Students may be placed in alternative settings because they are in need of social skills training, have exhibited severe conduct disorders or chemical dependency or are simply behind in credits. Additionally, retention, poor school attendance or truancy may interfere with students' educations (Lehr et al., 2003; Lehr et al., 2009).

The U.S. Department of Education defines alternative settings, through The Common Core of Data, as "a public elementary/secondary school that addresses the needs of students that cannot be met in a regular school and is provided through a nontraditional education that falls outside the realm of regular education, special education or vocational" (Lehr et al., 2003, p. 1). Although the above definition refers to alternative schools as public, some alternative schools are available in the private sector.

Alternative Settings

There has been a significant rise of alternative school options and student attendance has continued to increase over recent years (Lehr et al., 2003; Lehr et al., 2009). Of the 50 states and the District of Columbia, 47 have legislation addressing alternative schools, 71% have a definition for alternative settings, and 60% indicated that alternative setting approaches can be described in multiple and different ways (Lehr et al., 2009).

Most of the students in an alternative setting are high school students with about 20% being in the middle school and elementary grades (Lehr et al., 2003). According to recent studies, 12% of the students in alternative schools or programs for at-risk students are special education students with disabilities who have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) (Kleiner, Porch & Farris, 2002; Lehr et al., 2003,).

Alternative School Placement

Students can be enrolled in alternative schools by either choice or as a result of placement determined by an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) team decision. Of the students placed in an alternative setting, 65% end up there as a result of a decision made a student study team decision (Lehr et al., 2003; Lehr et al., 2009). Students are placed in alternative schools for various reasons: following suspensions or expulsions, failure to meet other criteria for retention in public systems (e.g. pregnancy), inability to graduate from public comprehensive high school because they are behind in credits. Some students exhibit the need for social training and can be difficult to handle because of severe conduct disorders.

Alternative schools are intended to provide an individualized and focused education for students who are at risk of failing as these students have been reported as having a higher rate of substance abuse, suicide attempts, and sexual activity. Alternative schools are also described as utilizing unique learning opportunities and expose students to strategies that prevent their dropping out of school altogether (Lehr et al., 2009).

Alternative School Characteristics

Common characteristics found in alternate school settings include small school enrollments, small classroom sizes, one-on-one instruction and frequent interaction between students and teachers. School-wide environments have been described as supportive with student centered curricula relevant to students' interests, flexible structures and schedules. Alternative schools also consistently emphasize and encourage individual decision making (Aron, 2006; Lange & Sletton, 2002). About 25% of the students have access to the core curriculum and state standards and will be able to take classes that count toward credits so they will be able to graduate and receive their high school diplomas. Other students are offered

vocational training, career planning, or service learning (Lehr et al., 2003) as it fits their cognitive and physical development. The settings for alternative schools can vary widely from separate buildings off campus to a school setting on campus in a separate building, wing or classroom (Lehr et al., 2003, Lehr et al. 2009). With the NCLB (No Child Left Behind) regulation in effect, teachers must be certified and highly qualified and have the skills to serve students with emotional, behavioral, and academic needs in all schools, including alternative schools.

Alternative schools receive funding from various sources such as state and local funds, federal monies, and largely from grants. This can cause alternative schools to be economically unstable, as they are so dependent on the economy (Lehr et al., 2003, Lehr et al. 2009). Because of the lack of economic stability, many alternative settings struggle with adequate textbooks, computers, curriculum materials, and building maintenance as well as repairs.

Purpose and Importance of Project

The purpose of this project is to observe and chronicle one alternative non-public school and tell a success story of how they incorporate strategies to ensure the success of students in special education. The product of this project is a brochure of best practices and enrichment programs implemented at the non-public school as a guide for parents, potential new teachers and even teachers looking to challenge their students from diverse and challenging backgrounds and make them successful. This brochure can provide prospective parents looking for alternative placements to meet their students by providing them an in depth look at one non-public school in San Diego County. This project also is important as it describes strategies for helping students learn successful life skills and feel safe, successful that can benefit other schools and teachers in

public and non-public settings, strategies prevent students from dropping out of school altogether (Lehr et al., 2009).

Guiding Questions

The purpose of this case study is to delve into one alternative school and investigate enrichment programs that one non-public school incorporates into their classrooms. The guiding questions for this project are:

1. What enrichment programs are offered by one non-public alternative school?
2. How does one non-public alternative school incorporate behavioral management, communication and social skills into their school day through enrichment programs to enhance their school-wide program?
3. What are the theoretical foundations of the enrichment programs?

Preview of Literature

The current literature explains that alternative schools have become an essential part of some students' educational path by offering an alternative educational setting for students with disabilities to achieve academic success. When students feel safe and are taught strategies, they will thrive and learn not just in school but in all aspects of their lives.

With small class sizes, highly structured classrooms and positive behavior methods, teachers are able to incorporate strategies, improve communication and social skills for the overall success of each individual student.

Preview of Methods

This project describes strategies employed by one non-public school that provides specialized educational instruction to ensure academic and social achievement of students, with a focus upon students with autism and other disabilities. In this setting, behavior management is

addressed through social behavior maps, reflections sheets, and positive behavior implementation. Communication is enhanced through collaboration skills, a teacher's relationship with the parents and the students, the different types of ways students communicate, and by teaching and communicating through social stories. Social skills are taught and enhanced through program activities such as yoga, chess, and animal therapy. This information is compiled and presented in the form of a brochure highlighting supports used at this school to meet the needs of all students with disabilities.

Definition of Terms

The following are a list of terms used throughout this project and their definitions.

Alternative School

Any public or private school having a special curriculum, especially an elementary or secondary school that offers a more flexible program of study than a traditional school

(Alternative School. (n.d.). *Wikipedia*. Retrieved March 19, 2014, from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alternative_school).

Asperger Syndrome

Asperger syndrome (AS), also known as Asperger disorder (AD) or simply Asperger's is an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) that is characterized by significant difficulties in social interaction and nonverbal communication, alongside restricted and repetitive patterns of behavior and interests. It differs from other autism spectrum disorders by its relative preservation of linguistic and cognitive development. Although not required for diagnosis, physical clumsiness and atypical (peculiar, odd) use of language are frequently reported (Asperger Syndrome. (n.d.). *Wikipedia*. Retrieved March 19, 2014, from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asperger_syndrome).

Augmentative and Alternative Communication

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) is an umbrella term that encompasses the communication methods used to supplement or replace speech or writing for those with impairments in the production or comprehension of spoken or written language. AAC is used by those with a wide range of speech and language impairments, including congenital impairments such as cerebral palsy, intellectual impairment and autism, and acquired conditions such as amyotrophic lateral sclerosis and Parkinson's disease (Augmentative and Alternative Communication. (n.d.). *Wikipedia*. Retrieved March 19, 2014 from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augmentative_and_alternative_communication)

Autism Spectrum Disorder

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) represents a range of conditions classified as neurodevelopmental disorders in the American Psychiatric Association's 2013 *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th edition* (DSM-5). This fifth edition redefined ASD to encompass the previous (DSM-IV-TR) diagnoses of autism, Asperger syndrome, pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS), childhood disintegrative disorder, and Rett syndrome. These disorders are characterized by social deficits and communication difficulties, stereotyped or repetitive behaviors and interests, and in some cases, cognitive delays.(Autism Spectrum Disorder. (n.d.). *Wikipedia*. Retrieved April 3, 2014, from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autism_spectrum_disorder).

Behavior

Behavior or behaviour is the range of actions and mannerisms made by organisms, systems, or artificial entities in conjunction with themselves or their environment, which includes the other systems or organisms around as well as the (inanimate) physical environment. It is the

response of the system or organism to various stimuli or inputs, whether internal or external, conscious or subconscious, overt or covert, and voluntary or involuntary (Behavior. (n.d).

Wikipedia. Retrieved March 19, 2014, from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Behavior>)

Challenging Behaviors

Challenging behaviour can be defined “as culturally abnormal behaviour(s) of such intensity, frequency or duration that the physical safety of the person or others is placed in serious jeopardy, or behaviour which is likely to seriously limit or deny access to the use of ordinary community facilities" (Challenging behavior. (n.d.) *Wikipedia*. Retrieved March 19, 2014, from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Challenging_behaviour). Challenging behaviour often is exhibited by people with developmental disabilities, dementia, psychosis and by children, although such behaviours can be displayed by any person.

Communication

Communication is the activity of conveying information through the exchange of thoughts, messages, or information, as by speech, visuals, signals, writing, or behavior. It is the meaningful exchange of information between two or more living creatures (Communication. (n.d.). In *Wikipedia*. Retrieved March 19, 2014, from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communication>).

Facilitated Communication

FC is a process for supporting the communication of a person by which a person referred to as the "facilitator" supports the hand or arm an individual while using a keyboard or other devices with the aim of helping the individual to point and thereby communicate (Facilitated Communication. (n.d.). *Wikipedia*. Retrieved March 19, 2014 from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Facilitated_communication).

High Functioning Autism

HFA is a term applied to people with autism who are deemed to be cognitively "higher functioning" (IQ>70) than other people with autism. Individuals with HFA or Asperger syndrome exhibit deficits in areas of communication, emotion recognition and expression, and social interaction (High Functioning Autism. (n.d.). *Wikipedia*. Retrieved March 19, 2014, from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/High_Functioning_Autism).

Social Skills

Social skill is any skill facilitating interaction and communication with others. Social rules and relations are created, communicated, and changed in verbal and nonverbal ways Social Skills. (n.d.). *Wikipedia*. Retrieved March 19, 2014, from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_skills).

Truancy

Truancy is any intentional unauthorized or illegal absence from compulsory education (Truant. (n.d.). In *Wikipedia*. Retrieved March 19, 2014, from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Truancy>).

Summary

The product of this project will be an informational brochure for parents, teachers and basically everyone in the education field who is interested in offering everything they can to their students while challenging each and every student to work to their full potential.

Chapter Two reviews the literature regarding best practices for integrating the teaching acceptable behavior, effective communication, and social skills into the academic rigor of the classroom, especially for students with special needs.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Helping disadvantaged students achieve educational success is essential in education. With a positive foundation among the staff, schools and teachers can create an environment where all students can be socially and academically successful using standard-based curriculum that is relevant and rigorous (Karns & Parker, 2007). When students are in an environment where they feel safe and they are being taught tools to help them become successful, they will thrive and learn techniques that will help them not just through school, but with all aspects of their lives. “Ultimately, teachers and parents, in heart of cool love must dare assume each person is competent and has intellectual potentials that can and must be reached.” (Goddard & Goddard, 2012, p. 141).

Alternative schools have become a part of many students educational path. Some students have failed to achieve academic success in the traditional classroom setting and a non-public school offers an alternative educational setting for students with special needs. The purpose of this project is to articulate in a brochure the key features of enrichment programs offered by one alternative non-public school. The brochure outlines how this non-public school incorporates behavior management, communication and social skills into the school day to enhance their school wide programs.

This chapter examines best practices for the teaching acceptable behavior, effective communication and social skill. These best practices are examined with an eye on supporting students with special needs.

Best Practices for Teaching Acceptable Behavior

Learning how to behave in a positive and acceptable manner are not easy for some students. This section explores literature that describes effective practices for teaching acceptable behavior. To understand these practices, it is critical to understand how behaviors are a form of communication. When some students misbehave, they are really trying to communicate something that they are unable to with their words.

This section describes the Behavior as a Form of Communication, Behavior Management Plan, Functional Behavior Assessment, Quality Instruction, Teaching Hidden Rules, and Positive Behavior Inventions and Supports.

Behavior as a Form of Communication

Challenging behaviors can have a negative impact on the learning not just of the student displaying the behavior, but the learning of the class as a whole. Disruptive or challenging behaviors divert time away from valuable academic instruction in the classroom and could possibly lead to an unsafe environment (Gut & McLaughlin, 2012; Witzel & Mercer, 2003). In an effort to control such behaviors, medication, restraints or punishment are often used and which rarely have a positive outcome for students and may even put children at further risk (Gore & Umizawa, 2011). Most every behavior has a purpose and an expected outcome (Karns et al., 2007).

The term challenging behaviors is used for disruptive behaviors or behaviors where students are a threat to themselves or others or reduces an individual's access to community resources (Gore et al., 2011; Moreno, 2009). These behaviors are chronic and resistant to common interventions (Moreno, 2009).

Behavior interventions receive more attention than any other aspect in the school system and pose the biggest problem creating a stressful environment for beginning teachers and also have a direct impact on the parents as well (Gore et al., 2011; Witzel et al., 2003). When students have low self-esteem in academics, they may exhibit behaviors (e.g., attention-seeking behaviors) to reach out or as a cry for help. Attention-seeking behaviors are among the most common form of student behavior (Witzel et al., 2003).

Autism Spectrum Disorders is a life-long neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by impairments in social interactions, verbal and nonverbal communication, and restricted, repetitive patterns of behaviors (Karkhaneh, Clark, Ospina, Seida, Smith, & Hartling, 2010; Myles & Simpson, 2001; Sansosti & Powell-Smith, 2006). Common behaviors accompanied with Autism Spectrum Disorder can include anxiety, depression, sleeping and eating disturbances, attention issues, temper tantrums, aggression and self-injurious behaviors (Karkhaneh et al., 2010). Asperger Syndrome is a qualitative impairment on social behavior that also impacts a child's ability in developing and keeping friendships. This leads to not being able to keep a job due to lack of understanding social norms among coworkers and supervisors (Myles et al., 2011). Of the children with Autism Spectrum Disorder, 40% are considered to represent high functioning autism or Asperger Syndrome (Freedman & Silverman, 2008).

Even though children with Asperger Syndrome display an interest in social interaction, they often fall victim to ridicule due to inappropriate social behaviors and obsessive interests. Despite their attempts at friendship, such ridicule often leads to alienation and they may become easily stressed out, and/or emotionally vulnerable throughout their academic years and into their adult life (Sansosti et al., 2006).

There is a higher dropout rate for students with emotional and behavior disorders. Effective practices that can be utilized to help keep students in school could include lower student to teacher ratio, highly structured classroom with behavioral classroom management, positive methods, school-based adult mentor, Functional Behavioral Assessment, social skills instruction, high quality instruction, parental involvement, and Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (Flower, McDaniel, & Jolivette, 2011). Providing students who are faced with suspension or expulsion with alternative educational options keeps students in the classroom verses having the students drop out of school altogether (Gut et al., 2012).

Behavior Management

Classroom effectiveness can be maximized through successful behavior management, which ultimately leads to academic success due to the students having more time to focus on academic instruction versus the teacher dealing with behavior problems. Effective behavior management may also lead to the increased overall safety of the school environment (Gut et al., 2012).

Lower student to teacher ratio will provide more personal and individualized instruction. Expectations and schedules are taught and enforced in a highly structure classroom environment and students can be taught how to self-manage their own behaviors (Flower et al., 2011). Rules are used to govern the classroom, norms are established, and the classroom expectations are set. Students then work to meet the expectations in the given setting (Green & Weade, 2014).

Functional Behavior Assessment

A Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) gives the teacher(s) and school officials a better understanding of what triggers a behavior or what the students' motivators may be so they can teach the student effective replacement behaviors (Flower et al., 2011). Students that are

taught to manage their own behaviors have a longer success period and are more likely to integrate for academics and into community settings (Koegel, Koegel, Hurley & Frea, 1992).

The FBA is a data collection process that collects valuable information such as antecedents and consequences for challenging behaviors that can be incorporated into a students' Behavioral Intervention Plan (BIP) (Moreno, 2011). A misconception of the FBA process is that it is only used for students receiving special education services. It can be an effective tool for all students who are displaying challenging behaviors (Moreno, 2011).

Teachers should learn what will upset their students and try to eliminate or reduce these triggers by making adaptations that set students up for success. Teachers should also be aware of triggers and make adjustments to student behaviors so they do not end up in a confrontation with a student (Shukla-Mehta & Albin, 2003).

High Quality Academic Instruction

High quality academic instruction is essential for all students, and particularly for students who are performing below grade level and in need of intervention. The effects of high quality instruction in academic areas such as reading, math, and writing can carry over to other subjects. Small group instruction can contribute to the facilitation of high quality instruction (Flower et al., 2011). Being able to identify learning gaps and having appropriate interventions available can address some of the student's achievement issues (Payne, 2008). Visual models and kinesthetic activities can maximize learning time and help the students learn concepts (Payne, 2008).

Teachers who promote active engagement by provide flexibility and options for students are less likely to have challenging behaviors arise in their classroom (Shukla-Mehta & Albin,

2003). Instruction must have relevance and meaning, conveying why the information is important and how it relates to students' daily lives (Karns et al., 2007).

Teaching Hidden Rules

Some teachers view inappropriate or poorly developed social behaviors as a lack of self-control or impulse control and are quick to punish instead of taking the time to teach appropriate social skills to students with Asperger Syndrome (Sansosti et al., 2006).

For students with autism, problem social skills are the hidden rules that somehow most people just seem to learn. Students who do not understand this hidden curriculum break the rules without even knowing. Myles and Simpson (2001) discuss how the rules change from teacher to teacher and person to person. There are even different rules for different places (Payne, 2008).

Teaching the "hidden" curriculum and providing the information while modeling what appropriate behaviors look like in a particular setting during the academic instruction is referred to as social participation (Green & Weade, 2014). Programs have been developed to teach students some of the basic social norms through instruction, modeling, guided-practice, and evaluation and they should be integrated throughout the students' academic instruction of their school day (Myles et al., 2001). Temple Grandin, a famous veterinarian and professor with autism, developed a rule system to guide her social interactions and behaviors. For example her second rule the courtesy rule: Do not do things to other people that annoy me.

By teaching academic survival skills and social skills in the classroom, a teacher can prevent challenging behaviors and set their students up for a higher rate of success (Shukla-Mehta et al., 2003). The FBA process can teach students new, positive behaviors and essentially enhances the quality of life for the student (Moreno, 2011).

According to Myles and Simpson (2001) students with Asperger Syndrome often know they are different socially and otherwise, which may lead to low self-esteem. They experience higher levels of depression, suicide, and other disorders related to self-esteem. Due to the social and communication challenges, students with Asperger Syndrome, need and benefit from being taught self-awareness, self-calming, and self-management strategies to promote emotional understanding (Myles et. al., 2001). For students with Asperger Syndrome, it is important to understand the scope and sequence of social skills as to avoid teaching skills that may be too advanced for the student to grasp at that specific time.

Social autopsy is a technique used to help students understand and reflect on social mistakes and use them as a learning tool. With the help of an adult, the student will dissect the problem and develop a plan for the next time the situation arises but the plan should ultimately be the students so they can have ownership of the plan in hopes they will be more likely to be able to recall the plan and utilize it as needed (Myles & Simpson, 2001).

Positive Behavior Inventions and Supports (PBIS) is a school-wide, three-tiered (i.e., universal, secondary, and tertiary tiers) framework for preventing behaviors by creating an environment where reinforcement is contingent on student performance of desired behaviors (Flower et al., 2011). By having a mentor at the school, students form a positive bond with an adult who can help them by listening, helping them solve problems, observing, encouraging and reinforcing appropriate behavior (Flower et al., 2011).

Challenging behaviors can be reduced through the use of PBIS and other positive behavioral supports as well as teaching socially accepted replacement behaviors to meet the students' individual needs (Gore et al., 2011). Positive reinforcement methods, such as the use

of praise, are more likely to have long-term effects on behavior change than negative methods such as punishment.

Teachers need to remember to reinforce behaviors they would like to see the students to continue to do (e.g., sitting quietly at their desk completing their academic work). A teachers' reinforcement can be delivered different ways such as through a simple smile, a gesture, a gentle touch or a pleasant comment (Shukla-Mehta et al., 2003).

Teachers can use rewards to reinforce a desired behavior or a behavior they would like to see occur again. Motivation can be intrinsic or extrinsic. Examples of extrinsic rewards are tangible objects delivered through a token system. Intrinsic motivation is developed by the student through task completion, feedback, knowledge of a new skill, and a personal sense of mastery (Witzel et al., 2003).

Students who have repeated failures or develop low self-esteem may become more dependent on extrinsic motivation. The goal is develop more intrinsic motivation, through the proper use and delivery of rewards and recognition of success through personal effort and mastery (Witzel et al., 2003).

It was demonstrated that students who received verbal praise and positive feedback had a significantly higher intrinsic motivation and it also impacted the student's time on task and attitude (Witzel et al., 2003). The more a teacher learns how to deliver verbal praise to students and understands what motivates their students to want to learn and perform to the best their abilities, the more a teacher will reflect on his or her classroom management practices to increase the overall academic performance of all students.

Myles & Simpson (2001) suggest ways to help build positive self-esteem in children. Improvement in socially acceptable skills and student willingness to participate actively in the

classroom learning community can be fostered by placing students in leadership roles, letting them know what they are doing right by utilizing positive language, finding out what students do well and help them to do more of it, modeling complimenting, and teaching students to complement one another. Teaching students socially appropriate behaviors and communication skills to replace unwanted behaviors offers students positive coping strategies to be successful in all aspects of their school day and in their everyday lives (Gore et al., 2011; Shukla-Mehta et al., 2003).

In summary, a best practice for teaching acceptable behaviors is to first see students' behaviors as a form of communication. Other best practices include effective behavior management planning, the use of a Functional Behavior Assessment approach to identifying the function of a behavior, quality academic instruction, teaching the hidden rules, and using positive behavior inventions and supports.

Best Practices for Teaching Effective Communication

Communication is how we interact with the people in the world around us. Therefore, it is important that teachers learn how to best communicate with parents, students, and other teachers. Best practices for teaching effective communication skills involve collaboration between teachers and parents and the formulation of a solid relationship with a student. Communication occurs through words, actions, gestures, and nonverbal cues. Stories may be used to describe a situation or teach students a skill or concept.

Collaboration Skills

Collaboration among teachers, parents and related service professionals (e.g., occupational therapists, psychologists) in decision making for student is critical in order to meeting the needs of all students, especially the needs of the ever-growing population of students

in special education (Morsink, 1992). Students eligible for special education have a collaborative team – an Individual Education Program planning team – rather than an individual making decisions with them on their behalf. No one person is making all the decisions. There is evidence that when decisions are made through school wide collaboration that it results in an improved school for all students (Morsink, 1992).

Parallel with adult collaborative planning and teaming, student collaborative learning or cooperative group learning is a social learning and teaching method used to create a “knowledge community” that can be an empowering experience which yields high academic outcomes. Collaborative learning opportunities foster students’ flexibility and adaptations skills as well as problem solvers skills. Problem solving and compromise are skills that can be utilized throughout a persons’ life especially in the work place environment (Beckman, 1990). Further, learning is expedited when students work together by pooling their resources. Students who work in cooperative groups experience a higher level of satisfaction in their assignments, a new appreciation for group development and a new understanding for what it means to be held accountable. These cooperative relations are highly desired in both personal and professional situations (Krom, 2012).

Teacher / Parent Relationship

Through communication and collaboration, teachers and parents together can build positive learning environments in which their students can thrive. Myles and Simpson (2001) suggests that parents and teachers work together to help the student understand that they possess positive characteristics that need to be celebrated. This is particularly important for students with disabilities, such as those with Asperger Syndrome. Children need the help of adults to

learn about and appreciate the positive aspects of their individual selves to build positive self-esteem.

Some parents may be overwhelmed trying to survive life so they may not have the time to dedicate to their child's education or may feel they are being "ganged up" on by the people trying to help their child. Creating an inviting and warm environment for your parents is an essential piece of a child's education (Payne, 2008).

Teacher / Student Relationship

A significant relationship fosters a positive learning environment and teachers can build a respectful relationship by insisting on high quality work and offering support. In a society where we expect our students to accept responsibility for their actions, we must demand nothing less from ourselves (Karns & Parker, 2007). Some high school students identified the following key points to identify a teacher who has respect for them: calls them by name, answers questions, talks respectfully to the them, notices them and takes the extra to say "Hi", and by offering help when needed (Payne, 2008).

Alternative Forms of Communication

Communication is essential to humanity and interactive communication is known as an exchange between two or more people (Cafiero & Meyer, 2008). Different students use a variety of ways to communicate with the people in their lives.

In her book, *I am intelligent*, Peyton Goddard, a woman with autism who was without a means of communicating until provided support to type through Facilitated Communication, speaks about the importance of having a communication system, using the following words>

The journey of life cannot be traveled without a clear mode of successful communication and listeners who caringly support. Of utmost importance is the

insurance that a system of communication supplies me, and for that answer, “Thank God.” First, without a voice, never are people safe; second, without the ability to communicate, a voiceless person is easily and unbearably frustrated by behaviors they must resort to and often incorrect interpretation of these behaviors. With FC (facilitated communication), I finally gained a mode of dependable communication, which has allowed me to tell the truth of my life and begin to relieve the fear, which plagued me (Goddard et al., 2012, p. 175).

The motor skills needed for communication are extremely complex and students with communication difficulties need to be provided with the tools, strategies, and technologies needed for them to be able communicate (Cafiero & Meyer, 2008). Sign language and / or picture boards have been long known to assist students with limited speech. Facilitated Communication, a controversial communication support, has been recently added to the available options of communication for people with disabilities. Giving these students a voice and opportunities for participation is essential (Schubert, 1997).

The gestures and nonverbal cues such as pitch, tone, stress, intonation, pauses, timing, and rhythm all provide meaning when communicating with students reflecting the teachers intent through their words or actions (Green & Weade, 2014; Payne, 2008). Included in the rules of conversation is turn-taking (Koegel et al., 1992). Students need both words interlocked with the meanings of the cues in order to appropriately participate both socially and academically (Green et al., 2014).

Teaching and Communicating Through Social Stories

There has been a gradual move from the syntax and semantic aspect of communication to a more functional approach of communication that is linked to the social interaction of language.

Social Stories concern the social interaction of language and are designed to teach students the rules of the world that may not be so obvious, particularly for students with autism. When students are taught more effective ways of communication, their overall behavior has been noted to improve (Koegel et al., 1992).

Social stories are brief, individualized short stories used to describe a situation, skill, or concept in a reassuring manner that can be easily understood by the specific student it was created for (Karkhaneh et al., 2010; Sansoati et al., 2006). Social stories answer the who, what, where, when, and why questions of a specific situation (Soenksen & Alper, 2006).

Through the guidance and direction social stories provide, students can learn self-awareness, self-calming, and self-management strategies in responding to certain social situations (Myles et al., 2001). Visual timetables, token economy, verbal and physical prompts, visuals, and positive reinforcement can be paired with social stories to enhance their effectiveness (Karkhaneh et al., 2010).

Best Practices for Teaching Social Skills

Social skills instruction involves teaching students how to follow instruction, ask a question, making and keeping friends, problem solving and conflict resolution, anger management, work-related skills, recognizing emotions, and more (Flower et al., 2011; Freedman & Silverman, 2008). Social skills also include nonverbal language such as paralanguage, facial expressions, space and touch, gestures and postures, rhythm and time, and personal hygiene (Myles et al., 2001).

Social engagement can lead to increased social awareness and communication skills. Activities, like starting and maintaining a conversation, can be taught and practiced in the group while teaching and modeling the new skills (Freedman & Silverman, 2008). A small social skills

group can be facilitated in the school setting by a psychologist, speech-language pathologist, counselor, a specialized teacher, or anyone! Students are taught to generalize the skill to new activities by using the new skill in a setting outside the small group session (Freedman et al., 2008; Myles et al., 2001).

Social Skills

Students with poor social skills may lack eye contact, have difficulty making or maintaining conversation, lack understanding of other perceptions and struggle with the literal aspect of the language. Students with autism may have difficulty with social relationships and maintaining friendships due to their social skill difficulties and intense interest in limited areas. These students may lack organizational skills, have difficulty with the change in routine and struggle with emotional self-regulation (Freedman & Silverman, 2008).

Children must use some form of communication in order to socialize and interact with one another (Soenksen & Alper, 2006). Social skills once were viewed as something that parents taught at home. More recently educators have attended to the broader lives of their students, including social skills, not just what occurs in the classroom. Students who have poor social skills are at a greater risk for not completing school and their chances of becoming employed and/or successful adults is greatly decreased (Elksnin & Elksnin, 1998).

Social skills are even more important for students with special needs, since these students exhibit more social skills deficiencies when compared to their typical developing peers. Students with poor language skills are more likely to avoid social interactions (Koegel et al., 1992). Social situations such as playing games or just hanging out can prove to be filled with frustrating activities which can lead to rejection, low self-esteem, and increased anxiety. Therefore,

programs need to be highly structured to teach the necessary skills of the activity to increase success for all the students (Freedman et al., 2008).

Teaching Social Strategies Through Yoga

Yoga has become increasingly popular as an alternative to traditional physical education activities especially when teaching students with autism and other disabilities (Tummers, 2005).

Children need to enjoy the physical activities they engage in order to build a foundation for lifelong health. Many professional sports teams have added yoga to their athletes schedule to help reduce injury (Toscano et al., 2008).

Yoga can provide students who are drawn to a less physical or competitive form of physical activity an excellent opportunity to achieve and maintain a healthy perspective on an activity that will lead them to a healthy lifestyle while enjoying the self-expression and social aspects that yoga provides (Tummers, 2005). Yoga is an individual activity where the students' can each work at their own individual pace and experience success (Toscano et al., 2008).

There are several physical benefits of practicing yoga - increased flexibility, improved strength, balance especially upper body strength, endurance, increase aerobic capacity, better circulation, a relaxed nervous system, and a fortified immune system through exercises called poses that strengthen, stretch, and align the body. Yoga also provides benefits that go beyond the physical aspect - increased focus and concentration, decreased stress levels, improved academic performance, and increased self-confidence and self-discipline. Teaching students to breathe and relax while stretching can bring students to a calm and focused state ready to learn (Toscano et al., 2008; Tummers, 2005).

Yoga also works as an effective strategy to help students deal with stress and anxiety. Children are taught breathing exercises that can naturally relax students and teach them self-

control and instill a sense of peace in their lives. Breathing is what sets yoga apart from other forms of exercise. Students participating in yoga have a decrease in behavioral issues learn (Toscano et al., 2008; Tummers, 2005).

Yoga has been practiced for years as a form of mental and physical exercise because it works and is now helping to improve students with their academic and behavior problems in the classroom and hopefully throughout their lives. It is an inexpensive healthy activity that can be performed in a variety of settings such as the classroom, a gym, or even outdoors. Yoga mats are nice because they provide natural personal space for the students. A place where the lights can be dimmed for relaxation is always a plus. Music can also enhance the experience and take it to the next level to help the students turn out the noises around them and focus on the task at hand (Tummers, 2005).

Teaching Social Strategies Through Chess

Chess is a game involving complex rules that has long intrigued people with its innovative combination of calculated moves in a bloodless battle for a winner. The pieces are reflections of the social structures of feudal Europe. The first chess tournament was held in London in 1851. Studies have shown that chess can improve reading scores and has other academic benefits along with social benefits for students of all ages and ability levels because it has a healthy mental pursuit piece added in (Carlson, 2004).

Chess is a tactile activity that can be used to enhance academic learning (Barrett & Fish, 2011). It has been noted that there are several mathematical problems involved in the game of chess that can be directly linked to multistep problems that children are required to solve. Students playing chess showed improvement in the areas of concentration and basic math skills.

Teaching children chess provides a means for focusing on the importance of the situation at hand. They can use it to reinforce skills such as concentration, problem identification, problem-solving, planning strategy, creativity, and lucid thinking (Barrett & Fish, 2011).

Teaching Social Strategies Through Animal Therapy

The saying “animals and children go together” suggests why animal assisted therapy (AAT) or pet-facilitated therapy (PFT) has been on the rise since the 1960’s when animals were first brought into hospitals (Polt & Hale, 1985). Service dogs are not considered pets and are able to enter public places with their handler (Obrusnikova, Bibik, Cavalier, & Manley, 2012). A teacher must get permission from the administration prior to bringing the pet on campus (Obrusnikova et al., 2012).

AAT animals as well as the children interacting with them should be monitored for signs of stress. Signs of stress for an animal may include shaking, ears back, and tail between the legs (Friesen, 2010). Pets must be clean and vaccinated and hand washing or hand sanitizer is a must to protect both the children and the animals (Watts et al., 2009; Friesen, 2010).

AAT has shown to decrease stress by reducing anxiety, lower blood pressure, and lower the heart rate of students when reading to animals while improving both the physical and emotional attitudes of the students while decreasing behaviors (Friesen, 2010; Polt et al. 1985). Students also seem to be more attentive, responsive, and cooperative towards the adults when an animal is present and benefited from the non-judgmental bond that was formed.

Having a dog in the classroom has encouraged some children to engage in social interaction and verbal communication. Therapy dogs seem to have a calming effect on children and reduce their anxiety when they are under stress (Friesen, 2010).

Summary and Connections to the Literature

The review of literature examined behavior and ways of structuring the environment for the success of all children. Teaching the hidden rules and having students reflect on their behavior helps to reduce anxiety and teach them strategies to help them cope. Positive behavior interventions will help to build self-esteem and motivate students to be the best they can be.

Communication and collaboration builds an empowering community where students feel safe and open to learning. Teaching students social skills enhances a students' overall education. Chapter three will examine and provide the methods used to create the brochure to include: the design, setting, students, classrooms, instruments, and the procedures used to complete this case study.

The brochure designed as the product for as this project used the research components addressed in the review of literature in this chapter. The purpose of this project is to investigate and share how one non-public school incorporates behavior management, communication, and social skills into the students' everyday academic instruction in hopes of teaching the students some strategies to help them cope with the everyday challenges of life.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This project describes one alternative non-public school and the best practices using to help their students to become successful in the classroom setting with the hopes that they will carry over to all aspects in their lives. The outcome of this project is a brochure which offers creative ideas that parents, teachers and principals who are looking to reach all the students in the classroom while challenging them to become the best person they can.

Questions

The guiding questions for this project are: What are the enrichment programs that are offered by this alternative School? How does this alternative school incorporate behavior management, and communication through related services such as speech therapy, occupational therapy, and social skills into the enrichment programs to enhance their program and the overall academic success of the students? What are the theoretical foundations of the enrichment programs?

Setting and Students

The setting is a non-public school in Southern California with a maximum enrollment of 45 students. The school currently has 28 students, of which 93% are Caucasian and 7% are Hispanic. Of the 28 students, 21 (75%) are male. The school provides specialized academic instruction to students with identified special educational needs who all have IEPs. Services provided go way beyond academics to speech therapy, occupational therapy, behavioral therapy, and social skills to name a few.

All but one of the students has been placed in this school based upon a team decision by each student's local school IEP team. One students' family has chosen to privately pay for their

child to attend the school. Some of the students have been placed in this setting because their behaviors have been deemed to impede the learning of themselves and others. Several students have autism or ASD. Some are eligible in the Emotional Disturbance special education eligibility category. A small proportion of the students work on grade level, but most students perform below grade level for one or all of the core academic areas of reading, writing, and mathematics.

Classrooms

This non-public school consists of five classrooms. There is one elementary classroom with students who range from 3rd grade through 5th grade. There is one middle school classroom with students that range from 6th grade through 8th. There is one 9th through 12th grade high school classroom where student are taking classes to obtain their high school diploma. A fourth classroom is for students in grades 8th through 12th grade who are working largely on functional life skills and who will receive their certification of completion and transfer to a post-high school (age 18 to 22) transition program after 12th grade. The fifth class is a transition class this year consisting of students who have already earned their certificate of completion from the program.

Project Design

The product of this project is a brochure that summarizes for parents and other interested parties the practices at one alternative non-public school attended by students whose parents have chosen the school as a private placement and students who have been placed at the school by a decision of their local school's IEP teams. The school has a good local reputation. Parents seem pleased and students are happy and successful. Parents comment on how much each student has grown while at the school and how happy the students are in the supportive

environment. When personnel from school districts and parents of prospective students visit the school, they speak positively of their experiences.

The format of a brochure was chosen to be visual reference for parents and teachers alike who are interested in learning about strategies used for students with disabilities, with emphasis on student with autism or ASD. The strategies used at this school can benefit all students who attend this and other schools.

Brochure Preview

In the brochure featuring the author's alternative school, the following teaching strategies are examined that encompass behavior management, communication, and social skills which are best practices that can implement into the classroom to greatly enrich the students' academic performance and overall being of the students.

Behavior Management

Behavior is a great place to start because as long as they are happening in classroom, it is difficult for the students to focus and learn. A behavior becomes a problem when it interferes with the students' ability to learn or if it presents a health or safety concern. Behaviors that can affect a students' health or their safety may include but are not limited to: running into the street or parking lot, striking, kicking or running out into or through a glass window, biting to cause an open wound, head butting, using objects to hurt others, and eating dangerous materials. If these behaviors occur, the student displaying these behaviors can greatly benefit from interventions offered by trained professionals.

A large number of students attending the school featured in the project already had a Behavior Support Plan (BSP) in place prior to enrolling. All had some form of behavior goals written into their IEPs. It is the goal of the instructor to discover the source and function of the

behavior(s) and teach students strategies that will enable them to be successful in the classroom, with the ultimate goal of returning back to the public school system.

Specialized behavioral supports: The A, B, and Cs of behavior. This non-public school has the luxury of having a full time Behavior Specialist assigned to the school. The Behavior Specialist provides yearly training for Assaultive Behavior Safety Training (ABST) and Positive Approaches to Behavior Support (PABS). The opportunity for ongoing behavioral support is available for all staff throughout the school year.

PABS is a training that helps staff to identify when it is appropriate to use a restraint or a timeout is needed. It also addresses ways to handle behavioral situations when out in the community or when dealing with law enforcement. The training provides insight on the four distinct stages of the assault cycle. The four stages are trigger, escalation, assault, and recovery. Staff is trained to identify warning signs to deescalate the behavior before it occurs.

When a student displays a behavior, it is the students' attempt to communicate. It is used to get something they want or to avoid something they don't want. What are the steps needed to determine what a student wants or needs? What are their behaviors trying to convey?

The ABC (antecedent, behavior, and consequence) method is used to identify where and with whom the behavior is most likely to occur and noting how the environment changes due to the behavior. The letter "A" stands for the Antecedent or what just happened prior to the behavior? Was the student being asked to complete a certain academic task or join an enrichment class? Was there a loud noise? Did the class move to area where the lighting was different? All of these antecedents can have different effects on the students in your classroom. Most of the time, the students are not even aware of what is causing them to become upset which makes them unable to communicate the problem. It is important to help the students identify the

source of the problem and either come up with a solution or give the students strategies to deal with whatever is causing them to become upset so they can successfully focus on the task at hand.

The letter “B” stands for Behavior that directly follows the antecedent. For example, when a driver of a car sees a red light, he or she will exhibit the behavior of stepping on the brake. If the antecedent is a student raising her hand, the behavior might be the teacher calling on the student. An antecedent precedes and often is a cause of the behavior.

The letter “C” stands for Consequence. A consequence is an environmental response a student experiences because of their behavior. Some responses students like so they continue to engage in that behavior. Other responses the students do not like so they engage in those behaviors less frequently. An example of an ABC is: the antecedent – I have a thesis project to complete, the behavior – I work hard to complete my thesis project, and the consequence – I will finally graduate in May with my Masters’ Degree in Special Education.

The consequence needs to “fit” the behavior to be most effective. If the consequence is too easy or too hard, it may trigger a behavior. Teachers need to be firm, fair and consistent when working with students and their behaviors. Teachers should never be afraid to take an extra minute or two to have a heart to heart talk with a student to find out what the source of the behavior is which may actually have nothing to do with school at all.

Classroom norms. The classroom rules or norms and the ensuing consequences need to be written down and posted somewhere in the classroom so that students’ are able to see them and refer back to them as needed. Consistency across school settings makes it easier for the students to comprehend the rules and execute them. It will also be less confusing for them. This will elevate any confusion the students may have. It is also beneficial for teachers to provide

positive feedback or to correct the students so they will understand the teachers are united in their behavior management. A positive reinforcement is something that is added for the benefit of the students' experience, like a special computer break, is put in place in order to increase the likelihood of reoccurring. With that said, keep it positive!

Students thrive in an environment where the adults are firm and fair through the enforcement of norms. This helps to remind the students that the teachers care of about them and their academic progress. Students catch on very quickly to empty threats, threats that cannot be carried out, such as telling the student they will not be going on the field trip. Is this really possible?

One norm is when talking to the students, to avoid using the word "don't". Instead, the best practice is prompt the student to do what is within the norm-following set of behaviors. This reminds them of what they should be doing. Students have behaviors and may not even know they are exhibiting them such as humming, tapping fingers, pencil or foot, or rocking in their chair. Students want to please. They want to learn and they want to be happy and they want you to be happy.

Structuring and planning a safe and flexible learning environment. The environment in which a student learn is directly linked to his or her achievement. Listen to what the students say and be open and flexible to making changes in order to benefit the students and the class as a whole. By structuring the environment, you can ward off some behaviors before they even begin.

The classrooms at our non-public school are highly structured with a maximum of nine students per classroom. Some students are provided a one-on-one support person through their school district for various reasons. A visual daily schedule helps to let the students know what

the schedule for the day will be so they can both mentally and physically prepare themselves for what will be expected of them throughout their school day.

A huge piece for the academic success of the students is lesson planning. Making sure the lessons incorporates all of the many learning styles to include visuals, auditory and kinesthetic activities will keep the students engaged and learning. Planning for every minute of every day and having extra activities ready a moment's notice is very crucial. Too much down time or unstructured time leaves room for trouble. It can set certain students up for failure.

The easiest thing to modify in the environment is the teacher and the way the students are being taught. The Golden Rule, "Treat others as you want to be treated," is a great starting point to structure the classroom. Making eye contact, tone of voice, movements and body language, the students all hone in on these things and the teacher should be a positive example for them. The teachers should treat the students as they would want to be treated. The teacher should treat every child as if they were their own child, and talk to them and treat them as if the parent were actually standing right there.

Preferential seating. Some students have preferential seating per their IEP and once that knowledge is applied, the student will be placed in a position for success. Even if it is not in the IEP, a teacher should be in tune to the students and know the best seating arrangements for their students' success. Preferential seating does not always mean the student will sit in the front of the class so be sure read the paperwork thoroughly. It may state that the students need to sit closer to the teacher, in the back, by the door or away from the door. The lighting, the amount of stimuli or busyness, the foot traffic could all affect the ability of the students to be able to focus and complete their class work.

Social Behavior Maps

Where are we going? Where is that? What are we going to be doing while we are there? How long are we going to be there? How long is the drive? Are we going to be eating snack / lunch there? Even as adults, these are normal questions we often ask when we are invited to go someplace or when told we need to be somewhere for our work.

A Social Behavior Map (presented in Appendix A) is an amazing tool that provides the teacher an opportunity to answer all of these students' questions ahead of time. But the most amazing piece is the ability to address the "hidden rules" and reduce students' anxiety when they are unsure of what will be happening next and what is going to be expected of them. Knowledge is power and the more they know, the better the results for everyone involved.

A Social Behavior Map can turn any and every outing or field trip into an enjoyable learning environment for all the students in the classroom, which in turns makes for a more pleasurable experience for the teachers as well. The rules are different for each place the class visits such as the rules for the library are very different from the rules at Chuck E. Cheese. This will help to set the boundaries for the students and no one is left guessing what will be expected of them.

The Social Behavior Map can be implemented in many different ways. In an environment where the class sizes are small, the Social Behavior Map can be completed as a whole group. The students who need extra assistance can be taken aside at a later time to fill in any missing pieces.

In a larger classroom, the students can be divided into small groups to brain storm and then have the class come together as a whole group at the end for discussion. By breaking into small groups first, the needs of the kinesthetic learners will be met. The students who get so

excited about learning, which the teachers love, this will give them an opportunity to move around the classroom and discuss their ideas with their classmates. By coming together as a whole group at the end of class, all the students will be aware of what is to be expected from them and offers the teacher an opportunity to address anything that may have been missed. This helps teachers from having to single out one or two students, which can be embarrassing and be a trigger for a distress behavior.

To incorporate this activity into the core academics, teachers can have the students fill out the information during their writing center time. To differentiate a writing activity into the various ability levels the students may have, the teacher can have one group of students write complete sentences, one group of students make bullets points and another can fill in the blanks.

By having the students write down the information, the need of the visual learners are met. It benefits the students who need to actually see it written in paper before it becomes imprinted in their brains. This also keeps all students actively engaged in the activity. Students can take the map with them in case they need a visual reminder on a field trip. This helps the teachers from having to repeat expectations throughout the field trip. Teachers can simply remind students to review the Social Behavior Map as needed.

I assure you that not only will the teacher have a more pleasurable experience but the students will learn so much more than they could ever be anticipated all while keeping the students' best interests in mind. Receiving praise from adults can be difficult when the expectations for behavior are not always clear and the hidden rules can really be sticklers at times. Parents can use Social Behavior Maps at home with their own children.

The Social Behavior Map can also be useful in helping students deal with other students. The person may be displaying behaviors or have mannerisms and are in need of strategies to help

them with the behaviors and gain control. By discussing these issues and helping the students come up with a plan, the students' are given strategies and tools to encourage them foster a positive relationship with all the people are around them.

Reflection Sheets

As adults, we are constantly questioning the things we have done. Did I make the right decision? Did I buy the right one? Did I pick the right profession? Did the discipline fit the crime? The list can go on and on. Any situation can be a learning experience where students can be given an opportunity to reflect and come up with possible solutions for future situations.

Table 1. Stop-Think-Act-Reflect (S.T.A.R.) Reflection Sheet

Name: _____ Date/Time: _____

| S.T.A.R. (stop, think, act, reflect) Reflection | |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| Zone I was in: | Blue Green Yellow Red |
| Feeling | |
| What happened? | |
| Who was there? | |
| Where did it happen? | |
| Size of the problem? | Small Medium Big |
| Next time this happens, my plan is to... | |
| 1. | |
| 2. | |
| 3. | |

One thing that is sometimes forgotten in a personal reflection is how our decisions or actions may have affected the people around us. That is the purpose and function of the S.T.A.R Reflection Sheet used at the author's school and presented in Table 1.

A presumption in using a reflection sheet is that any distress behavior has a function that communicates a need or unsatisfied need. There is an underlining reason why a student is acting a certain way. Students don't wake up and say to themselves, "I'm going to make my parent's or teachers' life miserable today." A student's actions are their way of communicating when they are unable to use or find the words to express how they are feeling about a certain situation or they may not be able to pinpoint what or how they are feeling.

Sometimes adults too just wake up cranky for no apparent reason. With that said, turn the situation into life learning lesson opportunity. Remind the students about how you didn't want to wake up at 5:00 AM to correct papers or go for a run etc. and then have to come to work today. We would all like to be at Disneyland today but teachers have to teach and students have to go school to learn.

During a person's lifetime, they will end up doing quite a few things they don't want too but have to do. It's just a part of life. In preparation for the real world, treat the high school classroom as if it's their place of employment and their classmates are their coworkers. Not everyone likes all of their coworkers. But we need to create a plan or strategies to deal with them during your working hours. If a person chooses to not go to work, they don't get paid and if they don't get paid, then no nice car, new clothes, and cell phone or game system etc. Again the list can go on and on.

As Table 1 shows, the S.T.A.R Reflection Sheet allows a student the opportunity to think about the situation from his or perspective. Most of the time, a Reflection Sheet is used to give

insight on a behavior that warrants change in order to be socially accepted. It can be used to help the student come up with positive strategies to make positive changes in their lives.

A reflection sheet, such as the S.T.A.R Reflection Sheet presented in Table 1 may include but is not limited to the student's feelings, what happened, who was there, feelings of the other person, where did it happen, the size of the problem, the size of their reaction, consequences and finally the most important part, the plan for the next time the situation may arise. There are several reflection sheets available on line, and some teachers customize ones for their school, classroom and even for an individual student.

Reflection sheets can be used for students of all grade and ability levels. Some students will be able to reflect right after the situation has happened but for other students they may need some time to deescalate and calm down prior to completing the process. Some students may use pictures to tell their story when describing things such as their feelings.

A best-case scenario in using a reflection sheet is when a student is able to fill out the reflection sheet independently. But if a student is young, new to the reflection process, still learning to write or struggles with writing, it is O.K. for the teacher to help them fill out the form by writing down the information the student provides. In this situation, the important piece is the student reflecting on the situation and learning from it.

Using a reflection sheet can create an opportunity to address other academic areas and use technology, as the student types in responses to the prompts in the form. Students can practice typing skills, skills that are an asset in their education and vocational future.

Steps in using the S.T.A.R Reflection Sheet. First on the list of prompts on the S.T.A.R Reflection Sheet is the feeling of the student. How was the student feeling at the time of the incident? If they are unable to tell you or say "I don't know" or "I am not sure", ask them to

draw a picture. If they are unable to draw a picture, pictures of different emotions can be presented for them to choose from. If the student has access to a computer, images of emotions can be found online, give the student several feeling options appropriate for specific situations. However feelings are expressed, it is important to know and understand how the student was feeling and what that looks and sounds like, so the teacher can become aware of the signs to looking for to help the students next time, before the situation escalates.

What happened? Two people can watch the same event unfold and come to two completely different perspectives of what happened. It is very important that teachers pay close attention to the students to find out what really happened. We may visually see one thing but the student may be having a whole different experience. Perception is key in the “what happened” part of the problem. If the students’ story varies from what was witnessed by the teacher, take the time to explain what was witnessed and how the other people around them may be having different feelings about the situation that just happened.

It is important for people to be aware of who is around them and especially who they let into their personal space. Students may be so focused on what has happened at that moment that they may not even be aware of who is around them. Remind them that it is completely normal to have the feelings they are experiences or the thoughts they are thinking but they need to remove themselves from any situation that may not be a positive one for them and remind them to keep their negative thoughts to themselves. Most of the time, they are able to identify who witnessed the event but if they did not know specifics, it is ok for them to assist in filling in the blanks.

Next it is time to discuss the feelings of the other person. Time and time again, this proves to be a tricky piece of the puzzle. It is hard for children to think about others and their feelings. The students may benefit from role playing or participating in a role reversal before

they can even begin to see the other person's side of the story. As children, it can be hard to grasp the concept and truly understand that people are different. It would it be easier if everyone was exactly like us. You may even have heard this once or twice before but this would be so boring! If everyone knew what everyone was thinking, the things they like and what makes them happy, and how their brains work. This would be amazing and a little scary to say the least. Do you really want to know exactly what everyone is thinking about? No, and this is not reality either, actually it is extremely far from reality. Understanding and acceptance are wisdom gained through maturity and then moving on to actually appreciating people for their differences is acquired through life experiences.

When helping the students talk through the situation, don't be afraid to make it personal. It is ok to let the student know their feelings towards are normal and you may even feel the same way sometimes. Students like and need to know that they are not the only one who had this problem and they are looking for someone to validate their feelings. It reminds them that teachers are human and they were kids once too.

The setting or situation seems so simple but it actually gives us more information than we think. As an adult, if we don't want to be exposed to second hand smoke, we just avoid frequenting places that allow patrons to smoke. Sometimes, however, it is not that easy. Students can be affected by things that are not visible to the naked eye such as the lighting in the classroom, noises, the proximity of a student to the board, or to the teacher.

It may even be the way the instruction in the classroom is being delivered. Are all the different learning styles being incorporated for maximum participation of all students? Are visuals and hands on activities being paired with audio instruction to ensure all the students'

needs are being met? When situations arise, teachers need to take time to assess themselves to ensure the environment of every classroom is being structured for the success of every student.

As teachers, we need to look for patterns in behavior. If the behavior is happening every time the class visits a certain place, the teacher should do everything in your power to change the environment for the success of the student. Never forget to listen to the student. A teacher could take a million guesses and never really figure out what the true problem is.

The size of the problem is the next area examined on the S.T.A.R form. How many times have you overreacted when thinking about your response afterwards? Every problem can seem like a big problem in the moment. Eventually, when given the right tools, students are able to discern big from small problems. Problem size can be visually displayed in the classroom by creating a mountain shape visual on a piece of paper and writing the word *small* at the bottom, *medium* in the middle, and *BIG* at the top. This visual can be used to talk about the notion that people actually have more small problems and very few big problems. The teacher can give students practice sorting small, medium and big problems. For example, the teacher could create pre-made problems for which the student is asked to decide where the problem belongs on the mountain. Or students may come up with their own problems, depending upon the students skills in problem identification. Small problems are problems that students can take care of independently. Problems like lead pencil breaking or needing to ask for help is an example of a medium size problem. Medium size problems can be solved by a student but requires the assistance of an adult. Examples of medium problems might be problems to correct such as forgetting your lunch or missing the bus. Big problems might be problems over which students have less control or that have large consequences to others, such as physical injury.

The most important part of the reflection sheet, of course, is the plan. The student will develop a plan they will use when the situation arises again, and they will be able to put their plan into action. This is where the teacher guides the student through the process of choosing at least two or three solutions to the problem. This way if one solution is not available, they have other options to choose from. It is always best to hear the students' solutions to the problem with the occasional modification by the teacher if needed. This gives the students a sense of control over the situation and because they came up with their own solutions, they will be more likely to remember them and be able to utilize the learned information next time the situation presents itself.

With younger children, teachers may need to provide sample solutions by modeling them in the classroom. This makes it easier for the students to learn the process of using the reflection form. Students might not know that something could be an option. For example, if a student is not able to focus because he is hungry, getting his lunchbox to get a snack is an option in the classroom. In this example, the student's knowledge of his power of self-advocacy and the soothing physicality of eating a snack while they complete their work creates a win-win situation.

Getting students to recall this learned information and being able to put this insight to use the next time the situation arises is the key desired outcome. With that said, for an auditory student, he or she will be able to walk away with the knowledge by just filling out the reflection sheet. The visual learner may need a copy on their desk or in a binder and the kinesthetic learning may need to roll play or act out the situation before it has a lasting impression.

In summary, ultimately in life, a student's academic achievement will only take him or her so far. Having a strategy such as the S.T.A.R reflection process to cope with difficult

situations in life sets a student up for success. Everyone experiences small problems on a daily basis; what sets a person apart from the rest is the ability to stop, think, act and reflect (STAR) on those problems.

Token Economy: The S.T.A.R. Buck Program

The S.T.A.R. Buck Program is a positive token economy reward system that has been incorporated at the author's school site over the last couple of years. Earned tokens - S.T.A.R. Bucks – can be exchanged for desired objects, events, or experiences. With the positive token economy behavior system in place, the punishing taking away response cost system has been happily replaced with opportunities for students to earn rewards for their positive behavior

Everyone has WIFM (What's in it for me?) moments. These WIFMs are the reasons why we do what we do. We get up and go to work because we look forward to your paycheck. We take care of all of your personal hygiene needs because we want people to like us and having friends or a significant other is important to you. The students are no different than the adults in this aspect.

For the success of the positive behavior reward system, it is first of all imperative to discover what the WIFM's are for each student in your class. What exactly motivates each and every student? What motivates them to complete their work and complete it correctly? What motivates them to exhibit their best behavior? These motivators of course will look different for every student and will be custom tailored for each student.

Teachers already do this when they provide prizes via their treasure box or classroom store. Teachers can purchase items that are things they know the students will want to work for and when the students see the prizes in the prize box, they are motivated and “keep their eyes on the prize” until it is theirs. They have to do this quickly before another student has a shot at

getting the prize they wanted so desperately. Once a teacher figures out what motivates the students, it is time to challenge the whole class with a class with parties which may include a movie and snacks.

Food motivates most people and it is definitely motivates children. They never seem to be able to get enough food to fill their little bellies and thankfully with their higher levels of energy and a metabolism that burns more calories, it all balances out.

One thing our school is not able to offer is a hot lunch program so we have joined forces and the students are able to earn S.T.A.R. (Stop, Think, Act, Reflect) Bucks and turn them in for lunch. For every 5 S.T.A.R. Bucks they earn, they earn one star and when they have earned 4 stars or the equivalent of 20 S.T.A.R. Bucks, they can redeem them for lunch.

Teachers can hand the S.T.A.R. Bucks out to the students when they are “caught” going above and beyond the expectation of the class, following the “catch ‘em being good” attitude and principle. A few ways students can achieve this and earn bucks is by helping another student, setting an example, or accomplishing a goal. If we praise them for doing good things, they will be more likely to repeat the behavior over again to achieve the same, positive results. And the plan is that they will get a sense of self pleasure that will make these good deeds a permanent routine in their lives.

There are a few rules to earning S.T.A.R. Bucks. Students are not able to accomplish a good deed and then ask for a S.T.A.R. Buck for themselves. This helps to defer students from executing good deeds just to earn a S.T.A.R. Buck, with the ultimate goal of earning lunch. Students, however, are able to notice a good deed of another student and inform a teacher. The teacher has the final say on if the S.T.A.R. Buck will be awarded. This helps to ensure friends are not trying to hook their friends up and that the act is also deserving of a S.T.A.R. Buck.

When a teachers issue the S.T.A.R. Buck to a students, both the name of the teacher and the name of the student are written on the buck as well as the date awarded and the act the student performed in order to earn the S.T.A.R. Buck. The teacher reviews the information with the student when they issue the buck to allow for another opportunity for praise. When students turn their S.T.A.R. Bucks in, they turn them into the speech pathologist and she reviews the comments with the students in the small group setting, which allows for yet another opportunity to praise the student and opens up a positive conversation for the group.

When a student earns their S.T.A.R. Buck lunch out, they are presented with an award on Tuesday that they take home and share with their families. The parents are aware of this incentive program, so this presents an opportunity for positive reinforce from the parents as well tighten the link between home and school. It also informs the parents that they do not need to send a lunch with their student for that Friday and solicits the teacher consent to take their child out to lunch. To offset the cost, each family is asked, at the beginning of the school year, to send in money for their child's participation in this program.

The lunch reward is paired with a social element, with students being able to ask any teacher or staff and another student to join them. This presents an opportunity to foster the relationship of trust and strengthen the bond between among students and teachers. The teacher and the other student provide their own money for their lunches.

To incorporate an academic piece with the lunch reward, the student can type a letter or create an invitation for the teacher and student they would like to invite. This focuses on the writing and possibility introduces them to the format of writing a letter or creating an invitation if they have never done it before. It also sharpens the computer skills of students, a skill they will use throughout their lifetime.

Communication Across all Settings

Teaching is definitely a team sport and the teams play better when there is a mutual respect for everyone and the expertise and experience each person brings to the team. At this alternative school, teachers are in contact with their co-workers on a daily basis. There is a Kindergarten team, 1st grade team, an English team, a Math team, a so forth. Each grade has a grade chair who leads the team. The grade chair is usually a teacher who has been at the school for the longest period of time or has the most teaching experience. Teams could include specialists such as a special educator, speech pathologist, occupational therapist, physical therapist, and school psychologist. Specialists and staff work together to build a specialized IEP team for each child.

The small school setting and smaller case load fosters an environment that builds a strong, cohesive team that works to the advantage of students. Teachers and therapists are strongly encouraged to have lunch together to stay abreast of meetings and, share information. The principal is also available to participate when needed. The week before school consists of a full week of training and time for staff to work together so the school year can start with everyone sharing common goals. Professional development is offered throughout the school year to keep the teachers abreast of current strategies based on research to incorporate into their instructional practices.

A list of personnel, their phone numbers and emails is shared at the beginning of the year to encourage ease of communication. All the teachers are at the alternative school featured in this project because they love the children and genuinely want the best for each and every student. It takes a village to raise a child. The classroom teachers at this alternative school build

a positive community, drawing on the abilities and talents of everyone. This energy trickles down to the students.

The school has an open door policy. Parents and visitors are asked to sign in at the front office but are more than welcome and encouraged to spend time with their children during the school day. The school has also hosted a shadow your child day where the parents are invited to spend the day in their child's classroom. Parents are able to participate in all activities and get to see their children in the comfort of their classroom environments.

Some of the families have had quite an educational journey prior to arriving at the school and the parents feel a breath of fresh air knowing they are welcome anytime and that behaviors are managed. Parents are not going to be receiving phone calls several times a day when their child is on the way to the principal's office again.

There are very few days in the school year when someone is not visiting the school for one reason or another. Purposes for visits range from testing or observing a student for their upcoming triennial IEP or an information gathering by a therapist from the students home school district.

Due to small class sizes, teachers are able to get to know their students on a personal level. The maximum number of students in attendance at the current time is 45. All teachers know all the students. Every student is given a "Good Morning" greeting from every teacher every day. Students know who the teachers are and feel comfortable enough to approach any teacher when they have questions or need something.

Social stories are one way teachers at this alternative school communicate with students to prepare them for an upcoming event or teach them about special situations. A social story is

usually created or used for a specific student but often taught to the whole group. All of the students can benefit from a friendly reminder of what they need to do in certain situations.

It does not take students very long to learn that they have a voice and are being heard. Students learn quickly that the teachers are there to help them and have their best interests in mind, both social and academic. Help can range from making friends, learning how to tie shoes, helping them make or cook their snack, and call parents if they forget something. Once a trusting relationship is formed, learning is exponential.

Social Skills and Enrichment

Most of the students at the school have a diagnosis of Autism or fall somewhere on the Autism spectrum. With that said, students may also have difficulty reading social cues and / or body language. Students are provided with ample opportunities to engage in social situations to work on any and all social deficits they may have and remember that all social situations look different for every student.

Teaching students to accept responsibility for their own actions is an important life lesson that a teacher can model by acknowledging when a student is correct and when he or she are wrong. Saying “I was wrong and I’m sorry” can be a difficult thing to do if someone has never done it before; however, it is a crucial piece of the puzzle for functioning in the world. Being able to fully understand and transfer concepts and life lessons taught and apply them to real life situations seals the deal for application to the real world and the future of students.

Teacher is a term that needs to be used to describe all personnel working with students. Students learn to treat all adults with the same respect. Students may also need a reminder that when the 1:1 staff or teachers’ aide, asks them to do something, it is because the teacher has given them the direction and has asked them to follow through on a specific task, even though

some students may have a hierarchy in mind for the personnel entrusted to work with them. There should not be a power struggle between the certified teacher and the instructional assistant. Students see a team of teachers who display a united front to students. The certified teacher at this alternative school understands that a paraprofessional can bring a wealth of information to the behavior modification, social skills development and the instructional process.

Along with academic instruction, students are afforded many opportunities to practice appropriate social skills. Several volunteers who offer their time to enhance and reinforce the skills necessary to insure student success at this alternative school.

Yoga. Yoga, I know what you're thinking, "I can't teach yoga, I'm not qualified!" Stepping out of our comfort box and trying new things can be challenging. We ask our students to do this every day in every subject we teach. In essence, teachers need to tell themselves exactly what they tell their students and that is "Just try it."

I had never even attended a yoga class prior to getting in front of my class and teaching it. Prior to my arrival, one of the teachers developed a how to yoga book with pictures of the different poses and the words that mirrored the poses. The book had actual pictures of students creating the poses. My first few yoga classes consisted of learning some of the poses and taking pictures of the students to create a class yoga book. Students can take leadership and lead yoga classes.

It wasn't long after I started yoga classes with my students that I personally started to reap the benefits. There was a noticeable increase in my flexibility and stamina and for the students as well. And the "yoga breaths", I just couldn't get enough of them. I still take "yoga breaths" to give my brain the ability to catch up with me before I say or do something I might later regret. I am amazed at how many tears I have stopped or slowed down through breathing

“yoga breaths” with my students. I start my yoga with three deep breaths, in through the nose and out through the mouth. We inhale the good air and exhale the bad air, letting go of all the bad things that may have happened in the morning – woke up late, burned breakfast, forgot our homework or just life in general. We are always talking about letting go of the things that cannot be changed and accepting them and focusing on the things that can be changed. A person has to stop looking back before they can move forward. This is a relaxing, fresh start to a busy school day, which the students learn is actually a privilege because not all children in other countries have the right or freedom to an education as they do here in the United States of America.

I have taught yoga to students in middle school, high school and in a practical skills classroom and they have all been very different. The following procedures for yoga class are followed at the alternative school where this project is focused. Each student is asked to provide a yoga mat at the beginning of the school year. I have also seen mats used in the public school by the Physical Education teacher so check with them first before purchasing new yoga mats or asking parents to purchase them. Be aware that some students may have cleanliness concerns and want to purchase and bring their own mats. A yoga mat provides a natural, personal space for students to demonstrate what the human body can do. Leave it up to students whether or not they are comfortable taking off their shoes or if they would prefer keeping them on. For health and safety reasons, students should not be bare foot at school. Girls may want to keep a pair of yoga pants at school.

Sitting front and center of the students, the teacher leads the yoga session. Students who would like to be leaders are seated up front next to teacher, one student on either side. The yoga leader role can vary from being in front of the class and demonstrating moves for students.

Taking the leadership role to the next level, the yoga leader or leaders can take turns reading the directions while leading the class through the different poses.

It's not a bad idea to have each student rotate being the yoga leader but the teacher is the one who knows students best. Make this one of the classroom jobs for which students can volunteer or teachers may assign. Knowing a class and the different personalities will help the teacher push each individual student to their full potential of leadership. For the shy students, being in front of the class may be a challenge. In that case, other students can lead the entire class. Yoga leaders are also responsible for setting up the area for yoga and cleaning up.

The length of the class is dependent on so many variables such as time in the schedule, availability of the gym or other places, for instance outside. Coordinate with the physical education teacher and work out a schedule. If all else fails, have the students practice yoga breaths and certain poses at their desks. Have students close their eyes to block out distractions and focus on the leader's voice. Yoga in general is done with relaxing or calming music played softly in the background. However, not all students share a love for music. Use sound blocking head phones for the students sensitive to the music. Students can select the music for yoga class either as a reward or it can also be one of the classroom jobs.

Chess. Chess is a game that has been around a long time. It is huge and there are tournaments played around the world. Chess is a detailed game that involves skill and problem solving. Most of the students at the school are elated to have an opportunity to learn and play chess with their friends. Chess provides students with an opportunity to practice problem solving skills.

The school has a volunteer who comes to the school twice a month to teach the principles and strategies of chess, monitor student understanding and application and lead chess sessions.

Each class is allotted thirty minutes to engage in the game. The students pair up and face off. Students rotate partners to encounter different challenges and learn new skills. Some students join other classes to improve their chess skills. They can even work their way up or be paired with the volunteer who has to this day has not lost to one of the students. She has earned the title, “Chess Expert.”

Game Club. Game club is offered for students not interested in chess for one reason or another. During the allotted chess time, students are paired up and agree on a game to play. Both of these activities provide students an opportunity to socialize with classmates in a controlled environment. Scripted questions are provided for students to help facilitate social interaction for all students during games.

Animal Therapy. People, especially children, are drawn to animals. Animals are loved for their strong sense of loyalty and unconditional love. The students at this alternative school have ample animal therapy opportunities to engage in positive experiences with animals in a controlled environment.

A brand new barn was built for the up and already running Equestrian Program. It exists of an arena with trails available for riding. The atmosphere is breath taking and creates a positive environment for students to relax. Students have the opportunity to actively engage in horseback riding every other week or twice a month. Alternate activities for rainy days are also offered. Students are taught how to bath a horse, brush the horse, and clean their hooves.

Upon arriving at the school, the range of how much physical contact each student has had with such a large animal as a horse varies greatly. A couple of the students are terrified of the horses but the norm is that most of the students have had contact with a horse or are willing and able to embrace the whole horseback riding experience.

Horseback riding skills are developed on an individual basis. Students learn the basics of riding and play games while making their laps around the arena. Games help the students work on fine motor skills. Some of the games include throwing balls into a bucket or throwing rings around a stake. The balls are of various sizes, shapes and textures to challenge students.

Students who have had limited contact with horses and are timid require gradual exposure to the animal and support that encourages them to keep trying, while praising all successful efforts. The steps may start with students standing by the horse, then touching the horse, to actually petting the horse, eventually to sitting on the horse, and finally riding the horse one day. Every time the student has his or her personal time with the horse, they wear a helmet and a belt. When students are ready to ride the horse, they will need to use helmets and belts to insure safety. There have been cases where this process has taken years to complete, depending on the individual student.

Some students find the horseback riding experience less than enjoyable and more as a check in the box on the list of things they must do to get through their school day. In this case, having them complete 2 laps or so, is a noteworthy accomplishment. To continue to challenge each student to their full potential, adding a lap every month, quarter, or 6 months is a great idea.

The norm is that most of the students enjoy their horseback riding experience and want to learn everything they can during their horseback riding time. Some of the students have even worked themselves up to where they can actually trot.

Other successful programs implemented in the past are presently not in place at the alternative school, but could be. The first program consisted of 2 therapy dogs whose owners volunteered to share with students who visited with the dogs as a whole class for 15 minutes.

During this time, students had the option of brushing the dogs, walking the dogs, or lying next to them. A student could choose to read to the dog and the other students while in the group.

During this time, the volunteers answered any questions students had about the dogs, how to handle, and groom the dogs while demonstrating appropriate techniques in caring for therapy dogs. Both the owners and dog volunteers were calm in demeanor and provided positive interactions for students.

There also was a Reading Dog that volunteered at the school. Students had an opportunity to spend 20 minutes one-on-one reading to the dog. This was beneficial for the students because they could read to the dog without the pressure of having someone judging them or laughing at them if they made a mistake. Students could choose a book at their independent reading level to read to the dog or in the case of the Read Dog, the dog actually had a blog and the students could choose to read his blog.

Educating our children and future leaders in this world is an honor with which to be entrusted. Teachers have the responsibility of not only teaching student but more importantly to model appropriate language, behavior, social skills and academic skills.

Every behavior a student displays is a call for attention or help. At the alternative school students are taught to use their words to communicate the real source of their behavior. With a highly structured environment and academic instruction that meets the needs of the individual student, the teacher is creating a warm, loving environment where it is possible for any child to learn and thrive. To set the example, teachers need to first look at themselves and their own actions to see if any adjustments can be made and then perform a functional behavior assessment to delve into the source of their own behaviors.

Social behavior maps help students become aware of the hidden rules in different environments and situations encountered in school. Social behavior maps help to relieve the students of any anxiety they may be feeling about an upcoming, unknown situation. A reflection sheet allows students the opportunity to reflect on situations from their perspectives. Teachers are then able to guide the students in selecting strategies in hopes of providing positive solutions to a problem.

Communication is the key to success when dealing with a parent, coworker or student. Students are able to learn when they are in an environment that fosters positive communication and praise, where they feel safe. Being a team player who practices open and honest communication is essential to the success of teachers and students in the classroom.

Social skills are a must for a person to live a successful life after leaving the education system. Students with AS require an environment where appropriate social skills are taught and social relationships are fostered in a structured environment. Social skills can be modeled and taught through various activities such as chess, game club, yoga and animal therapy.

This chapter covered the unique array of opportunities offered to students with special needs at the alternative school this project describes. The needs of the students are met through behavior management, positive communication, and social skills that support all students enrolled to become the best students they can individually become. Chapter 4 presents the brochure that showcases the components of the alternative school featured in this project.

Chapter 4
Project Brochure

THE COUNTRY SCHOOL

1145 Linda Vista Drive Suite 105

San Marcos, CA 92078

760-744-4870

TERI Inc., to include The Country School, serves students in San Diego County and the Southern Riverside County area. They offer an alternative education path for students with disabilities ranges from 8 years to 22.

**The Summary of a
School Where
Teachers Incorporate
Programs to Ensure
Success for Students on
the Autism Spectrum
and Other Disabilities.**



- FIRM, FAIR, CONSISTENT
- Highly Structured Classrooms
- Engaging Lessons
- Small, Structured Classrooms
- Positive Behavior Supports
- Parents, Educators, & Students work together
- Open Door Policy
- Team Teaching
- Social & Academic Focus
- Offers a Variety of Elective Classes
- Real Life Problem Solving

Behavior



Students Learn:

- ❖ Anxiety Reduction Strategies
- ❖ Hidden Social Rules
- ❖ Empathy
- ❖ Reflection
- ❖ Problem Solving Strategies

Social Behavior Maps

- ✚ Reduces anxiety by informing the students
- ✚ Explains the “hidden rules” making the expectations clear

Reflection Sheets

- Encourages children to reflect and think about others
- Gives children strategies and/or tools in their tool box to deal with problem situations in the future

Positive Reinforcement

“Catch em being good!”

Communication



Students Learn:

- Behaviors Communicate
- Attitudes affect Behavior & Behavior affects Attitude
- Gestures & Nonverbal Cues for Effective Communication
- Role Plays of Social Stories



Social Skills

Students Learn:

- Trust Building
- Two-Way Communication
- Decision Making Strategies
- Conflict Resolution
- Leadership Skills



Chess



Yoga

Animal Therapy



Equestrian Program,
Volunteer Animals,
The Reading Dog

Chapter 5

Reflection and Conclusion

This project told the story of one alternative school to showcase the best practices being used to help students with disabilities become successful in the classroom setting. The goal of the programs being implemented at this school is that students will transfer the skills and strategies they have learned to manage the academic, social and emotional aspects of their lives and create habits of mind to understand their strengths. The outcome of this project was the creation of a brochure to share creative ideas that parents, teachers and principals looking to reach all the students in the classroom can utilize while challenging students to be the best persons they can be.

Educational Recommendations

Behavior

Behaviors are a form of communication. It is a way for students who are unable to or have difficulty using their words to communicate to the people in their world that something is not quite right. Challenging behaviors can negatively impact the education of the student displaying the behavior and possibly other students in the classroom. Students may be displaying behaviors as a cry for help because they are not performing at grade level and are struggling academically. Or, students may be drawing attention to themselves through noncompliant behaviors. It is our job as educators to help students recognize and name attention getting behaviors and teach them strategies to be successful in the classroom so they can attend to instruction and learn.

Small classroom sizes at the featured alternative school and a highly structured environment with engaging lessons plans utilizing visual models and kinesthetic activities while

providing flexibility have greatly reduced behaviors to maximize academic success. When classroom rules are set and teachers are firm, fair, and consistent, students will then work to meet or exceed the expectations.

Positive behavioral methods such as praise or a smile can have a long term effect on the behavior of a student. Teachers at the alternative school reinforce behaviors they want to see students displaying while trying to ignore the negative attention seeking behaviors. When a student is receiving positive feedback he or she is more likely to be motivated to want to learn and to perform well to meet expectations.

Communication

Keeping the door of communication open by offering an open door policy is a recommended method for teachers, coworkers, and parents to form a relationship with students' best interests in mind. When students trust their teachers and feel safe in their environments, respectful relationships are formed and student learning is greatly enhanced. Some high school students in attendance at the alternative school noted this can be done with a simple "Hi", calling them by name, talking respectfully to them, and by offering help when they need it.

When we think of communication, the first thing that comes to mind is words, but communication is so much than just words. It includes our actions, gestures and nonverbal cues. Teachers should always be aware of their body language when working with the students. Most of the students with Autism at the alternative school use a form of facilitated communication as their voice, and teachers at the school are open and willing to listen to them.

Teachers at the featured alternative school use social stories to communicate and describe a new situation or teach a new skill or concept to students by answering the who, what, when,

where, and why questions in a situation by teaching the social rules of the world not obvious to the student with autism or ASD.

Social Skills

Students with ASD also have a social impairment that may include a lack of eye contact, struggles with literal language, and difficulty starting and maintaining conversations which leads to difficulty maintaining friendships. The result is low self-esteem and increased anxiety.

Social skills at the featured school are modeled in small group settings and encouraged through a variety of activities to include but not limited to yoga, chess, game club, and animal therapy. These activities help to reduce stress and anxiety while teaching students strategies such as deep breathing to increase their overall physical fitness so they can return to a calm state and be ready to learn.

Recommendations for Brochure

The project brochure can be utilized as a quick reference for prospective parents looking for programs like the ones being offered at the alternative school showcased in this project to benefit their child's academic success. Teachers can also use the brochure as a reference for ideas of programs and strategies they can incorporate in their classrooms to meet the needs of all students especially, students with disabilities.

Limitations

This project was limited to the observation of one alternative non-public school and limited to the observational interpretations of one observer who is a teacher at this school. This project can be expanded upon by interviewing teachers, parents, and students to include different types of school settings. Another recommendation is to conduct this project in another geographical location. This observer only described in detail one reflection sheet and there are

several versions available. This project can provide valuable information for students who are struggling in regular education but do not currently fall under the realm of special education by incorporating these strategies in any classroom.

The programs utilized by the alternative school are exemplary in that parents seem very pleased with the education their children are receiving. The accounts of the programs and the school may appear to be biased at times because the author works for the company and strongly believes in the program where the students are receiving more than just an academic education but behavior, communication and social skills that will be able to use throughout their lives.

Reflection

Being entrusted to teach students has been an amazing experience in which I have learned so much. To say that I work in one of the most rewarding professions would be an understatement. And to think, I had no idea what I was going to do with my future upon leaving the military with my Bachelor's in Psychology. I would say I have found my calling.

A few of the students who attended the school being showcased in this project have been able to transfer back to their home school districts and successfully return to the public school sector. Several of the students have been able to graduate and earn their high school diplomas and enroll in college or earn their certificate of completion and move to a transition program offered by their home school district where they have been able to continue their education offered through the public school system until they reach the age of 22 years old.

We currently have a student who has been at the school for at least 10 years and will be graduating this spring. When the shooting at Sandy Hook happened, his mother sent an email saying that she used to lie awake at night wondering what the future would hold for her son. She noted that she felt her son was safe at the alternative school because of the caring teachers and a

program that supported and encouraged her son who will be graduating soon and be off to college.

There is one student who spent his middle school years at the school. His behaviors were impeding his learning and the learning of others. While at the school, he did not enjoy nor could he foresee the benefits of the programs or strategies being offered. He transitioned back to the high school in his school district during his freshman year. He returned to the school to complete his volunteer hours by working with the students and helping them. At this time, he informed us with his head down (he's over 6 foot so we could still see his face) and a smile on his face that the strategies he was taught at this school actually helped him to deal with certain situations he was facing at his new school so he could be successful.

Success stories like this remind me why I love to come to work every day. Success stories of this school and others like it are strong reminders that with the right environment and caring teachers, every child is capable of learning, growing, and achieving.

The field of education is an ever changing, ever growing field of work and it is important for teachers, especially in special education, to stay abreast of the latest programs and educational tools available for students by attending professional development trainings and always yearning to learn more. Teachers must challenge their students and not expect any less of themselves than they expect from their students.

Conclusions

Once a child is in a safe educational environment where individual needs are met, where the focus is on challenging each student to do his or her very best work and very best thinking, learning is enhanced. When a child is displaying behaviors that may seem inappropriate, it is an attempt to commute with others in their world. By teaching all students strategies designed to

address individual challenges and giving them tools for their tool boxes, all students can learn to take control and focus on academic success. Focusing on teaching social skills, according to teachers, parents and teachers, has resulted in the overall growth of every student.

What really matters to insure success for all students is a group of teachers who build a community that cares about students and finds programs to ensure success for students on the Autism Spectrum and other disabilities. Students with unique challenges need a varied, clearly focused program focused on social skills and academic success.

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Appendix A
Social Behavior Map

Social Behavior Map Permission

Hello,

I am graduate student in the process of writing my Masters Project. I am writing to request permission to include a copy of the Social Behavior Map, both a blank copy and one that is filled out, in my paper. We use this tool often in my school and it is a beneficial tool that I believe all students can benefit from.

Thank you very much,
Casey Lynn

Pam Crooke (Think Social Publishing, Inc.)

Mar 04 20:45

Yes - you can certainly include the map in your thesis and I'm sure you'll cite the source. Also, please share your results with us when you are finished with the study!

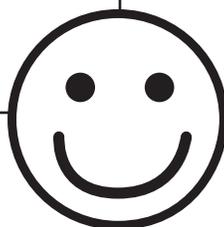
Pam

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San Jose, CA 95128

Social Behavior Mapping

What's Expected for:

| Expected behaviors | How your behaviors make people FEEL | How people react to how THEY FEEL about your behavior | How YOU FEEL about yourself based on how people react to you |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------|---|--|
| 1. | | | |
| 2. | | | |
| 3. | | | |
| 4. | | | |
| 5. | | | |



¹ Social Behavior Mapping is the original work of Michelle Garcia Winner, *Thinking About You, Thinking About Me* (2007), pages 156-157 (www.socialthinking.com). Permission to reproduce Social Behavior Maps was granted by Michelle Garcia Winner.

Social Behavior Mapping

What's Unexpected for:

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|----------------------|-------------------------------------|---|--|
| 1. | | | |
| 2. | | | |
| 3. | | | |
| 4. | | | |
| 5. | | | |



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