

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

Cultural Linguistic Diversity

Utley, C. A., Kozleski, E., Smith, A., & Draper, I. L. (2002). A proactive strategy for minimizing behavior problems in urban multicultural youth. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, 4(4) 196-207.

BOTTOM LINE

The social-emotional needs of children in urban school communities place these students at risk for educational failure. For these children, successful teaching and learning models appear particularly complex because they must combine both multicultural approaches and effective positive behavior support (PBS) strategies that promote healthy, prosocial behaviors. This article examines trends in the racial disparity in exclusionary discipline procedures that impact the schooling experience of urban children. The article also presents a conceptual framework for understanding culturally influenced social behaviors and discusses ways to incorporate multicultural education into PBS programs.

Beach Center on Disability

Making a Sustainable Difference in Quality of Life



KEY FINDINGS

- To combat growing school violence, more schools are adopting a school-wide system of positive behavior support (PBS). PBS is a systems approach to help schools educate all children, especially those with challenging social behavior.
- PBS is steeped in applied behavioral analysis to solve school-related behavioral issues through prompting, rewarding and shaping prosocial behaviors.
- Critics of the use of PBS in the urban schools point to the underlying tensions caused by who decides what behaviors are appropriate in PBS programs.
- National trends indicate a disproportion number of suspensions and expulsions among African Americans and Hispanic students. Many of these students live in urban settings.
- One plausible explanation is urban students are influenced by poor living conditions that effect six areas of social development: (a) poor adult-child relationships, (b) a lack of personal efficacy or power, (c) a need to accept personal responsibility for their own behavior and learning, (d) low self-esteem, (e) a poorly developed sense of social cognition and inability to understand other's feelings, (f) poor problem-solving skills.
- The implications of multicultural perspectives for educators include the following: (a) social behaviors are influenced by culture, (b) learning and social interactions are intertwined and connected, and (c) both students and teachers are engaged in constructing knowledge through social interactions.
- Educators are therefore challenged to do the following: (a) interpret the behaviors of learners from culturally diverse backgrounds, (b) distinguish social behaviors from deficits, and (c) employ instructional strategies to help learners maximize their schooling experiences and acquire the most productive interpersonal skills.
- Before judging behaviors as deviant, general and special educators must acknowledge culture and social environment as critical factors when developing effective educational practices.

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- A cultural systems approach to education “considers the organization of society”, specifically the roles and status assigned to cultural groups within a society as a major determinant of cognitive and social development.
- A multicultural education approach that could potentially impact and be used with PBS programs includes the following major concepts: (a) be certain to include in education the exceptional and culturally different, (b) focus on human relations, (c) use a curriculum that is cultural responsive to the culture, language and learning styles of all students.
- According to some researchers, multicultural education encompasses the following concepts: (a) Cultural backgrounds and ethnic identity are critical determinants in teaching and learning, (b) Racial, cultural and ethnic biases permeate schools, (c) The diversity that characterizes the current student populations require a plurality of instructional programs and strategies, and (d) the ethnic identity and cultural backgrounds of students are as important in instructional planning as their physical, psychological and intellectual capabilities.
- Successful PBS programs for urban, multicultural students require cultural sensitivity, caring and respectful relationships between teachers and students and a nurturing school environment to create learning communities in schools.
- Cultural responsive PBS models must focus on the following: (a) school’s demographic composition of students, (b) students who are referred for chronic, inappropriate behaviors, (c) students who are earning poor grades, (d) students who are not attending schools, and (e) students who do not have schooling opportunities to learn.
- School-wide PBS contains three levels of support: (a) clear expectations and positive feedback, (b) functional assessment and individual interventions, (c) functional assessments and comprehensive service across multiple environments.
- One essential component of infusing multicultural principles is “cultural competence” which includes the following aspects:
 - ◆ Everyone in the United States needs to learn and practice from a cultural competence perspective.
 - ◆ We must learn to accept our own ethnicity and another’s without judgment.
 - ◆ It is imperative to recognize the importance and acceptability of culture.
 - ◆ There is no one model or approach to cultural competence.
 - ◆ We must avoid substituting one set of stereotypes for another.
 - ◆ Cultural competence takes a long-term and consistent commitment to achieve.
 - ◆ Cultural competence requires ongoing communication
 - ◆ It is important to recognize the region, size and diversity of the ethnic minority population.

METHODS

- The authors wrote this article based on their review of the literature and their own experiences in the field education.

RELATED PUBLICATIONS

Carr, G. E., Horner, R. H., Turnbull, A. P., Marquis, J. G., McLaughlin, D. M., McAtee, M. L., et al. (1999). *Positive behavior support for people with developmental disabilities: A research synthesis*. Washington, DC: American Association on Mental Retardation.

Kline, S., Simpson, R. L., Blesz, D. F., Smith My1es, B., & Carter, W. J. (2001). School reform and multicultural learners with emotional and behavioral disorders: Issues, challenges, and solutions. In C. A. Utley & F. E. Obiakor (Eds.), *Special education, multicultural education, and school reform: Components of quality education for learners with mild disabilities* (pp. 118-139). Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas.

Sugai, G., Horner, R. H., Dunlap, G., Hieneman, M., Lewis, T., Nelson, C. M., et al. (2000). Applying positive behavior support and functional behavioral assessment in schools. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, 2(3), 131-143.

Turnbull, A. P., & Turnbull, R. (2001). *Families, professionals, and exceptionality: Collaborating for empowerment* (4th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill/Prentice Hall.

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