Including Social, Emotional, and Behavioral High-Leverage Practices in Pre- and In-Service Teacher Learning

Timothy J. Lewis

"Effective teachers recognize that academic and behavioral support strategies are more effective when delivered within the context of positive and caring teacher-student relationships."

—McLeskey et al., 2017, p. 55

Executive Summary

Through a recent iterative process, a panel of researchers, practitioners, and policy makers, several High-Leverage Practices (HLPs) were identified to support not only special educators' success, but also their K–12 students' progress in the classroom (McLeskey et al., 2017). High-Leverage Practices are those that meet minimum research-based standards to be deemed "evidence-based." In addition to Collaboration, Assessment, and Instruction HLPs, panel members identified four evidence-based Social/Emotional/Behavioral practices as high-leverage: a) establishing a supportive and consistent classroom environment (HLP 7), b) providing high rates of positive specific feedback to students (HLP 8), c) explicitly teaching appropriate social behavior (HLP 9), and d) using the logic of functional behavioral assessment to guide individual student behavior support plans (HLP 10).

Aim & Background

All educators experience low-intensity, chronic challenging K–12 student behavior, such as disrespect and disengagement, as well as more intense episodes including, but not limited to, physical and verbal aggression. Beginning teachers, including special educators, are especially likely to encounter K–12 students' challenging behavior as they are often assigned to high-needs schools and classrooms and enter the field with minimal behavior management fluency (Boe, Cook, & Sunderland, 2005). This is an especially acute challenge across classrooms serving children and youth with Emotional/Behavioral Disorders (EBD; Henderson, Klein, Gonzalez, & Bradley, 2005). The undesired post-secondary outcomes for children and youth with EBD and the high rates of exclusionary discipline practices among this group of students is well documented (Bradley, Doolittle, & Bartolotta, 2008) and points to a clear and critical need to ensure that special educators working with K–12 students who display high rates of challenging behavior become fluent in evidence-based classroom and behavior management practices.

Given all of the above, the unfortunate result is a perfect storm, which has contributed, in part, to undesired K–12 student outcomes and teacher attrition. As such, pre- and in-service educators need to develop not only an understanding of how disability or risk and K–12 student learning history impact classroom performance, but also a sophisticated set of skills to address K–12 students' academic and social-emotional-behavioral challenges from a universal to an individual student level. The set of HLPs (i.e., HLP 7, 8, 9, 10) related to promoting pro-social K–12 student behavior allows teacher educators to prepare special educator candidates in providing a continuum of supports—all of which are grounded in the principles and practices of applied behavior analysis and that fit contextually within the explicit instruction framework for special education.

Findings, Implications & Recommendations

If K–12 students' social, emotional, and behavioral outcomes are to improve, teacher educators need to ensure that all in- and pre-service special educators are fluent in implementing classroom-based positive behavior supports. Fluency building requires clear connections between in-service foundational knowledge and high rates of guided practice with performance feedback (Guskey, 2002; Joyce & Showers, 2002; Knight 2009). Within pre-service special educator preparation programs, students should first understand that behavior, both pro-social and challenging, is functionally related to the teaching environment. This basic logic serves as the foundation across the four social-emotional-behavioral HLPs. This means that, first, teachers must build an environment that increases the likelihood that desired or pro-social behaviors will occur by establishing clear procedures and routines that are implemented consistently using culturally relevant practices (HLP 7). Second, teachers must deliver high rates of positive specific feedback when K–12 students demonstrate desired social-emotional behaviors across a variety of contexts and situations (HLP 8). These two practices will help create safe and supportive environments in which differentiation in individual student instruction can be embedded. Third, special educators should explicitly teach social-emotional-behavioral skills to build K–12 student fluency (HLP 9). Finally, once environments are established to promote pro-social K–12 student behavior through the first three HLPs (i.e., 7, 8, 9), functional behavioral assessments (FBA) should be conducted to ascertain the conditions under which K–12 students continue to display challenging behavior (HLP 10). FBAs allow special educators to develop individual positive behavior support plans that address individual student patterns of challenging behavior and the environment (i.e., a functional relationship). Individual student plans should address not only the maintaining function of the challenging behavior, but also the connected environmental (HLP 7 & 8) and on-going social-emotional skill instruction (HLP 9) supports.

> *"Practices that are critical in promoting student social and emotional well-being include establishing clear and consistent behavioral expectations and related rules to support a respectful, positive, predictable classroom."*
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> *—Lewis, 2017, p. 95*

In order to build fluency across the four social-emotional-behavioral HLPs, teacher educators should consider the following recommendations when providing professional learning to pre- and in-service special educators:

1. Develop an understanding of the basic principles of applied behavior analysis.
2. Practice implementing environmental supports (i.e., routines and procedures) with high rates of positive specific performance feedback within clinical and student teaching experiences. In-service teachers should engage in coaching and other strategies to continue to receive performance feedback.
3. Develop an understanding of the essential features of conducting small group social skill instruction based on both behavioral and cognitive-behavioral principles.
4. Work alongside behavioral specialists who are fluent in conducting FBAs and developing related positive behavior supports and interventions to build their own fluency in the logic of FBA.

Conclusion

When teacher educators intentionally spiral and scaffold the four social-emotional-behavioral HLPs into pre-service teachers' curriculum, they begin building candidates' understanding and fluent use in explicitly teaching K–12 students social-emotional skills and creating safe, predictable, supportive, and caring learning environments. Using a similar approach, pre- and in-service teachers can also build an understanding of the principles and practices of applied behavior analysis, allowing them to contribute to the FBA process and implementation of related individual behavior support plans. To attain and sustain mastery of these, and all identified HLPS, special educators will require ongoing support through professional learning opportunities with feedback.

References

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Figure 1. Resources for Teacher Educators on Social, Emotional, and Behavioral High-Leverage Practices

Resource & URL	Brief Description of Content
CEEDAR and CEC, High-Leverage Practices in Special Education https://highleveragepractices.org	This site contains all of the HLPs with complete descriptions and additional related resources. HLPs 7, 8, 9, and 10 are aimed specifically at social, emotional, and behavioral supports and interventions.
U.S. Department of Education, OSEP Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports https://pbis.org	This site contains several sources related to developing and supporting children and youths' social/emotional/behavioral needs from schoolwide to individual supports.
U.S. Department of Education, OSEP Ideas that Work, *Supporting and responding to behavior: Evidence-based classroom strategies for teachers* https://osepideasthatwork.org/evidencebasedclassroomstrategies	This monograph contains additional evidence-based classroom social/behavioral supports and strategies.
IRIS Center https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/	The IRIS Center website has several online modules and other resources related to HLPs for both academic and social/emotional/behavioral supports.