

Johnny be good! Positive behaviour initiatives in schools

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There is a grass roots movement afoot in our schools. It is affecting our public, Catholic and independent schools in every state. It is affecting our primary and high schools and is cutting to the very core of our teaching and learning philosophies.

We can't make students learn.

We can't make students behave.

But we can create environments in our schools that increase the likelihood that students will learn and behave.

This grass roots movement is called Positive Behaviour (PB) and goes under various names – PBL or Positive Behaviour for Learning; PBIS or Positive Behaviour Interventions and Systems; and PBS or Positive Behaviour Supports.

Nomenclature aside, the basic thrust of the Positive Behaviour movement is the same

– training students in a social curriculum of respect, how to be successful learners and providing clear expectations of how to behave in the various environments and situations of school life.

A recent front page news item in Queensland's *Courier Mail* was headlined *Tasers for Teachers* and outlined an alleged proposal to issue 50,000 w Taser stun guns to teachers in an effort to quell rising bad behaviour in schools. PB offers a far more palatable and constructive alternative.

PB emanates from a solid foundation of evidenced-based research and practice in the United States where over 13,000 schools are now implementing PB practices. PB is also spreading to schools in Northern Europe and Scandinavia, Canada, New Zealand and China. Over 25% of

schools in NSW and Qld are now implementing PB, as are schools in Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia and Western Australia.

In September, Queensland hosted a PB conference in Brisbane with the keynote address given by Prof Tim Lewis from the University of Missouri. An enthusiastic national audience heard a persuasive message, backed with research data, that school environments that increase the likelihood of students learning and behaving are guided by a core curriculum and implemented with consistency and fidelity.

Usually, when school staff talk about improving behaviour the focus is on playground behaviour or behaviour while away on sports events or excursions. Rarely is the classroom raised as an area for behaviour improvement. Lewis believes this is because we treat our

classrooms as 'personal' and 'proprietary' no-go areas to our colleagues. However, behaviour data consistently shows the classroom is the main source of behaviour referrals. Lewis cites Sanders (1999) "the single biggest factor affecting academic growth of any population of youngsters is the effectiveness of the classroom." Therefore, every classroom should provide effective social and academic instruction. If classroom teachers are struggling, it is a systems issue not an individual teacher issue, says Lewis. Kaufman (1993) states "...attempts to reform education will make little difference until reformers understand that schools must exist as much for teachers as for students. Put another way, schools will be successful in nurturing the intellectual, social, and moral development of children only to the extent that they also nurture such development of teachers."

So, let's examine these three PB guiding elements of core curriculum, consistency and fidelity.

Core curriculum

In the context of PB, core curriculum refers to the social agenda and focuses on the socially important behaviours the school seeks to instill in its students. For example, Oxley Park PS in Sydney's western suburbs has: *I am Respectful, I am Safe, I am a Learner*. This social curriculum should be based on local issues or problems and aims to teach students what they should do instead of continuing their problem behaviours.

Consistency

Consistency is about ongoing, sustained and purposeful training for staff and students alike. Lewis talked about introducing mini-modules and tip sheets presented regularly to staff to reinforce

Where to from here?

- If you are interested in finding out more about implementing PB in your school you can contact your local PB consultant. A PB sharing website will soon be online at www.pbis.org.au. This site will allow the sharing of resources to support PB initiatives in schools.
- Conference papers for the 2010 Brisbane PBL Conference are available at <http://www.learningplace.com.au/deliver/content.asp?pid=47359>

Upcoming PB conferences

National PBIS Leadership Forum

Chicago, Illinois, 14th–15th October 2010. Details can be found at www.pbis.org

8th Annual International Conference for the Association of Positive Behaviour Supports

Denver, Colorado, 11th–12th March 2011. Details can be found at http://www.cde.state.co.us/pbs/download/pdf/CalendarOfEventsAtAGlance_2010-2011.pdf

Watch for the 2011 PBL Conference in Brisbane. Dates will be published here when announced.

initial training and to steadily move staff toward a shared understanding and implementation of PB practices and systems. He also likened the process to a marathon rather than a sprint – change takes time and consistent effort.

Fidelity

Australians struggle with the term 'fidelity'. It seems such an 'American' term and we tend to want to substitute the word 'integrity' for fidelity. However, the meaning of the term fidelity exactly fits its purpose in PB culture. If we think in an audiovisual context, we understand fidelity to be a measure of how accurate or true the sound quality of a system.

The higher the fidelity, the truer or accurate the sound quality on the (implied) sound quality continuum. Apply the same understanding to the implementation of practices and systems into an organisation and we can now view fidelity as being

a benchmark or marker of how true and accurate is our performance or endeavours. The truer and accurate our implementation, the better are the results or outcomes we can expect. Appropriate synonyms for fidelity are precision or rigor.

The term 'integrity' has the connotation of soundness or perfectness. It is a term of completeness whereas fidelity is about moving towards an ideal.

So, in PB, fidelity is about implementing the core social curriculum in a cohesive staff/student endeavour with all participants pulling their full weight and seeking to improve their own and others' contributions.

How can we know the success of our consistency and fidelity? The proof is in the data collected to provide evidence-based assessments of progress. In the next PB article I will share the *10 Steps to Effective Evidence-Based Practices in Your School*.

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