

Sabbatical Report 2011

Martin Major
Parklands School ~ Te Kura o Pakarana
Motueka

Acknowledgement

I wish to express my appreciation to the Parklands School Board of Trustees for supporting my sabbatical leave application. The professional development opportunity has enabled me to visit schools, engage in professional conversations and to catch up on reading, which in the normal course of day to day management is extremely challenging to undertake.

I thank the senior leadership team who so capably led the school during my absence and the whole Parklands School team who supported them in this role. I also thank the school leaders and specialists I met in Australia and the USA who openly shared their time, ideas and information.

Purpose

The purpose of my sabbatical leave was to investigate 'active supervision', its relationship to a reduction in disruptive behaviours in the classroom and links to improved academic performance.

Rationale and Background Information

Active supervision refers to a general set of strategies used to promote prosocial behaviour in non-classroom settings. The 'active supervision' model is an aspect of the school-wide Positive Behaviour Support (SWPBS) developed in the USA and Australia and now part of our Ministry of Education's 'Positive Behaviour for Learning' (PB4L) strategy currently being implemented. Our school is one of a number of schools in low decile communities, who identify problem behaviour as a barrier to student achievement, and who have been selected to participate in the first round of PB4L training.

This initiative is based on a team approach for creating and sustaining safe and effective schools. It focuses on preventing problem behaviour, developing social skills, reinforcing desired behaviour, consistent management of inappropriate behaviour and using data-based assessment and problem solving to address concerns ... studies of this approach have shown a sustained drop in disciplinary referrals and suspensions, increased instructional time, a positive increase in the learning climate, with corresponding improvements in literacy and numeracy. (Ministry of Education)

PB4L requires schools to gather behaviour data from across the school and use this to make informed decisions to address concerns. What stood out in our initial data was that a high proportion of our behavioural incident reports were coming from the playground – hence my interest in exploring active supervision as a means to improving this situation.

Activities Undertaken

The sabbatical provided the opportunity to:

- Attend the 2011 Queensland School-Wide Positive Behaviour Support Conference in Cairns
- Read, discuss and reflect on a range of publications about SWPBS in general and active supervision in particular

- Meet with SWPBS specialists
- Visit schools and discuss implementation experiences
- Refresh, recharge and refocus

I was privileged to meet with Diane Feeley, Kansas City PBS Consultant, and with Dr Mary Richter, Missouri State Co-ordinator for SW-PBS, and Nanci Johnson, Web/Data Consultant, at Missouri University. Diane also arranged for me to visit two PBS exemplar schools - Westview Elementary and Lewis Elementary in the Excelsior Springs School District.

Findings

Numerous studies indicate that, fully implemented, PBS improves overall academic outcomes because it creates a climate conducive to learning.

Active Supervision, along with other PBS/PB4L strategies, reduces disruptive behaviours and consequently leads to an improvement in the overall climate of the school, to peaceful, productive classrooms and improved student achievement.

One of the keys to PB4L is that we need to look at our behaviour as adults. If we want student behaviour to change, then some staff practices may have to change as well, and there is clearly a need for a more systematic approach to supervising students in non-classroom settings.

The following summary of the rationale for active supervision and recommended techniques may be useful for staff training.

Active Supervision

Classrooms are teacher directed and instructionally focused. They contain a relatively small number of predictable students. In contrast, the playground is student focused, has a social focus (large amount of 'free' time) and contains a large number of unpredictable students.

All members of the school community (including parents, volunteers and visiting professionals) are responsible for supervising our students, not just teachers.

Why does everybody need to be involved?

- Staff are outnumbered
- An adult presence encourages desired behaviours and deters problem behaviours
- Research shows that high rates of positive contact with individuals or groups of students significantly reduces problem behaviour for up to 90% of students
- It's up to all of us to contribute to developing the school climate we desire

Active Supervision involves moving, scanning and interacting.

Guidelines for Active Supervision

Moving

- Avoid standing in one place
- Movement should be:
 - Constant
 - Unpredictable
 - Planned/Purposeful
 - Targeted (known problem areas, activities, groups and individuals)
 - Designed to increase contact opportunities

Scanning

- Use visual and aural cues
- Identify appropriate and inappropriate behaviours
- Look around by scanning all areas near and distant
- Listen for whining, bickering or arguing
- Target known problem areas, activities, groups and individuals
- Be pro-active – pay now or pay later!

Interacting

Interact with students effectively and efficiently

- Greet students (be brief)
- Positively reinforce students who are following the rules (Be explicit: 'That's what I call being safe')
- Positively correct students who are breaking the rules (State the rule, give choices, then put it back on the student)

Delivering corrections

- Take the student aside – avoid embarrassing the student in front of others
- Use calm voice and a business-like manner
- Describe the problem behaviour – avoid argument
- State the school rule that was broken or expectation that wasn't met
- Ask for acknowledgement or ask student to restate it
- Provide choices ("You can ... or you can ...")
- Remind the student of the school's consequence
- Put it back on the student ("So what's the plan?" or "You need to")
- If the student complies, praise for making an appropriate choice
- Use a pre-planned consequence immediately if the student does not comply
- Have an emergency back-up plan if the student becomes unmanageable

Other Considerations

- Pick your battles: decide which behaviours are important to target and which are not
- Be consistent: correct each inappropriate target behaviour in the same way for each student

- In situations where the student is presenting extreme, threatening or unsafe behaviour get help immediately

Look the part

- Highly visible adults reduce student anxiety
- Be easily identifiable (bright vest)
- Maintain a presence – head up, make eye contact

Interacting

Positive Contact is:

- Friendly, helpful, open appearance
- Proactive, non-contingent attention
- High rate of delivery of 'positives'

Adult attention is one of the most powerful motivators for kids – and it's FREE!

Efficient and effective positive contacts should be:

- Short (5-10 seconds)
- Involve groups over individuals so that more students are affected

Positive greetings should be non-specific in content: "Hi everyone. It's good to see you!" rather than "Hi guys. What are you making?" or "Hey John. Nice job picking that up".

Look and sound genuine, but avoid greetings that might keep you tied up.

High rates of positive contact with individuals or groups of students can be expected to significantly reduce student problem behaviour for up to 90% of students.

Effective Positive Reinforcement

- Look for appropriate behaviour – always
- Provide acknowledgement immediately
- State the appropriate behaviour – "You're keeping to the left. That's what I call being safe"
- Vary statements of acknowledgement
- Avoid giving praise continually without reason
- Be sincere and smile

Summary

- Teach expected behaviours and routines in specific settings
- Remind or prompt students of the expected behaviours before they enter these settings (pre-corrections)
- Actively and positively scan, move and interact with students
- Reinforce students who display appropriate behaviours
- Consistently apply pre-planned consequences if the student does not comply
- Have an emergency back-up plan if the student becomes unmanageable

References

The following websites include a wealth of research information, resources and materials.

- Queensland <http://www.learningplace.com.au/> (includes section on New Zealand's PB4L)
- Missouri <http://pbissmissouri.org/>
- USA <http://www.pbis.org/>