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# LITERATURE REVIEW ON INTERVENTIONS FOR DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR

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## LITERATURE REVIEW ON INTERVENTIONS FOR DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR

### Abstract

Incorporating arts education can be a valuable intervention for students in an urban setting. Teaching through the arts can act as an initial, Tier One intervention, for students who exhibit disruptive behaviors in the classroom, due to trauma, as well as benefit the overall classroom culture. The arts curriculum has a restorative power that allows students to learn social-emotional regulation skills, bodily-awareness, and expression.

Some students come to school, particularly in an urban environment, coping with traumatic experiences. The reality of their daily lives may have an affect on them, emotionally and socially. Art education may serve as an outlet for emotional expression by helping students learn how to self-regulate. Emotions from trauma may surface in the classroom as disruptive behaviors such as defiance, self-harm, elopement, that is, running away from their classroom or school setting, or aggression.

### Interventions for Disruptive Behaviors

According to the National Health Policy Forum, “one in five children suffer from a community’s criteria for a diagnosable emotional disorder” (Koppleman, 2004, p. 2). These children have a harder than average time trying to enjoy life, excel in school, and form meaningful relationships with others. Disorders range from mild to severe, and their effect on children, if left untreated, can be harmful.

Students living in urban communities are more likely to experience trauma due to violence, death, neglect, poverty, and abuse. Children may respond to these traumatic experiences in the form of disruptive behaviors in the classroom. Students who suffer from trauma or behavior disorders are likely to exhibit severe behaviors such as violence, disruption, self-harm, and defiance within the classroom (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010). Students who

exhibit disruptive behaviors may be put on a behavior plan or be referred for an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for Emotional Disturbance or will miss academics due to being suspended from the classroom. Many of these students are boys of color, which causes an increase in the over-representation of this demographic within special education, and also aids in the continuation of systems such as the “school to prison pipeline” and achievement gap (Wilson, 2014).

There are two disorders that are commonly used to define disruptive behavior in the classroom: Emotional Behavioral Disturbance (EBD) and Oppositional Defiant Disorder. EBD is a general term that includes anxiety disorders, manic-depressive disorder, oppositional defiant disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, reactive attachment disorder as well as many more. Students with these disorders may exhibit behaviors such as running away, commonly referred to as eloping, screaming, self-harm, tantrums, violence, and destruction of the environment. Triggers in the general education classroom may not easily be noticeable or preventable. These types of severe and disruptive behaviors affect everyone in the classroom.

According to a recent study comparing the aggressive disruptive behaviors of first graders in both high-poverty and middle-class areas, disruptive behaviors are 65% more prevalent within Title I schools than in suburban public schools (Thomas, Thompson, & Power, 2008, p. 517). They found students from urban schools to be twice as likely to be living in poverty and to have witnessed violence within their communities. These factors can cause trauma, which then transfers to the classroom through disruptive behavior.

Children in urban schools have additional challenges with disruptive behavior that may be trauma based, and exhibited in the classroom. It is further found that due to commonly

existing zero tolerance laws now popular in schools, this amount of disruption relating to trauma, EBD, or Oppositional Defiant behaviors contribute to the achievement gap.

The achievement gap refers to the observed, persistent disparity of educational measures between the performance of groups of students, especially groups defined by socioeconomic status (SES), race/ethnicity, and gender (Wilson, 2014). When students exhibit these types of behaviors in the classroom, they are frequently sent out of the classroom causing them to miss academic instruction and fall behind in school, which leads to the achievement gap. This unfortunate downfall is caused by a zero tolerance policy for disruptive behaviors such as those exhibited by students with EBD.

It is important to keep students diagnosed with EBD or students who display disruptive behaviors in the general education classroom. The following researched based strategies for students with EBD can be implemented within the general education classroom: (a) forming strong relationships, (b) implementing social/emotional curricula, (c) yoga and meditation, (d) behavioral graphic organizers, (e) art, and (f) dance.

According to Fecser (2015), one of the best things teachers can do for these students is to build a trusting relationship between the adult and the student. Along with relationship building, Fecser suggests many other classroom strategies such as keeping a predictable schedule, providing choice, movement breaks, teaching children about their brains, and utilizing logical consequences for behavior (Fecser, 2015). Many of these factors go along with good teaching strategies, but will also assist in keeping things consistent for an easily triggered student. Dr. Fecser also mentions the importance of the teacher maintaining a calm and confident demeanor and really stresses the significance of staying as consistent as possible. Traumatized and

oppositional students often have difficulty building attachment; therefore, it is important to become a safe and trusted person in the eye of the student.

The Schlein, Taft, and Tucker-Blackwell (2013) narrative inquiry-based study examined teachers' experiences with classroom management with students diagnosed with EBD. This study found that it is very important for teachers to know the neighborhood and home life of the student of concern, maintain the behaviors within the classroom, be culturally understanding, and focus on the students' academics more than their behaviors (Schlein, et al., 2013). The importance of relationship building was stressed through systems such as 'check-in check-out' and 'lunch bunch'. Check-in, check-out is a system in which students are acknowledged and supported at the start of every morning and throughout the day. It allows teachers to see how the student is feeling and if their basic needs are being met. 'Lunch bunch' is another relationship building strategy in which the student is able to eat lunch with a group of his or her friends and the teacher. In both of these studies it is very clear that the teacher's behavior affects that of the students.

Another classroom strategy for teachers in the general education classroom includes implementing social emotional curriculum as a strategy to support EBD students. A pilot implementation of the Cool Tool, a social-skills strategy curriculum, found success in the added curriculum. It studied ten disruptive third and fourth grade urban elementary school students. Teachers directly taught social skills and gave opportunities for students to have direct practice in using them. The curriculum included two main rules with subcategories:

- (1) Be respectful of others and self; do your best, follow and listen to directions, remembering respect in all you do.

(2) Be safe- hands and feet to self, walking at all times (Utley, Greenwood, & Douglas, 2010, p. 180).

The findings in the study reflect that student on task performance increased for the target population, and the occurrence of disruptive behaviors decreased. Results also indicated that the level of teacher praise for those students increased by ten percent, which may have had an impact on improving student performance (Utley, Greenwood, & Douglas, 2010).

Toolbox is another social emotional curriculum that teaches twelve tools a student can use for self-soothing and as an approach to resolving conflict with peers. Toolbox is a relatively new curriculum implemented at many urban schools across the United States. The findings of the study reflect improvement in the school climate and connectedness for children, teachers, and staff documenting improved communication between school and home (WestED, 2010).

Toolbox effectiveness is under ongoing investigation through the University of California, Berkeley. Results indicate social emotional curriculum can support the overall classroom culture and further support students with EBD to learn emotional coping strategies and appropriate social skills.

Yoga and meditation are also strategies a general education teacher can implement into the classroom to support EBD and disruptive students. Steiner, Sidhu, Pop, Frenette, and Perrin (2012) studied 37 children with ED at an urban elementary school. Students completed yoga in small groups of 7 to 10 students, twice a week for 3 months. Teachers reported improved attention in the classroom, adaptive skills, and reduced depressive symptoms, behavioral symptoms, and internalizing symptoms. A study of 5 different fourth and fifth grade classes conducted by Bishop, found that mindfulness training that lasted for 12 weeks reduced the amount of problematic behavior within the classroom and involuntary responses to social stress.

Behavioral Graphic Organizers are also proven helpful to support students with EBD in the general education classroom. The use of an Antecedent-Behavior-Consequence Graphic Organizer (ABC-GO) was implemented to support three kindergarten aged African American male students with ED to prevent their removal from the classroom. When a student exhibited a behavior they were given time to cool down, and then they wrote or drew (a) what triggered them, (b) what their reaction was, and (c) what their consequence should be (McDaniel & Flower, 2015). The study found that the ABC-GOs reduced the amount of time students spent outside of the classroom and helped the students become more aware of their triggers. The graphic organizer is a strategy that not only allows students to think deeply about their reactions and triggers, but also gives them the ability to have choice in their consequences.

#### Benefits of Arts Education

Fanelli and Klippel (2001) closely examined the importance of arts education for urban youth. The authors studied the intrapersonal qualities that arts education develops within students that transfer into academic areas and social-emotional wellbeing. The study took place in 1998-1999 at an inner city school in New Jersey. They created an after school program with a team of artists in residence. The focus was on third grade students. Artists included a dancer/choreographer and musician. Students participated in many arts exercises and at the end were provided a questionnaire about their work. The authors tracked specific students and their intrapersonal development over the course of the study. Students who participated in this program gained a heightened sense of self worth. Findings included reports that qualities of self-esteem, self-knowledge, cooperation, and trust improved through participation in the arts program.

Creedon (2011) had a similar study, which included arts education for students in an urban setting. This article also takes a socio-emotional stance on the importance of art education for inner-city communities. Creedon stated that stress is bad for students and that growing up in an inner-city community can be damaging to children. She also articulated that high stress levels reduce one's ability to learn. She questions the ethical level of denying children growing up in urban schools the access to arts and music education. Students growing up in these areas are often subjected to poverty, violence, and death on a daily basis. Arts and music education can act as a preventive pediatric medicine that benefits a child's mental and physical needs. Creedon examined types of art and classified them for specific purposes. She found that visual arts help with stress, creativity, reading, and writing. Music can improve a child's mood and support growth in literacy.

Dance increases self-esteem and emotional literacy in students. Dance Movement Therapy (DMT) allows students to develop awareness of self-awareness within students, which can lead to emotional literacy. Meekums (2007) analyzed data from surveys students completed pre- and post- tests. The author also evaluated from observations and interviews. Students were gathered from the classroom to have one-on-one DMT sessions that included props (physical objects) and music.

Teachers identified specific goals as the framework for evaluating the result of this study. Goals included increased self-esteem, emotional expression, and social functioning. One teacher recorded deterioration in a student's behavior specifically identified for DMT. Meekums tracked and recorded themes that emerged from the data during DMT sessions. Themes included success, mastery, special and powerful. During DMT students were informed that the key rule included a promise to do no harm to self, others, or space. Meekum noted activities that students



created such as hide and seek and rituals of the same movements. One student highlighted in the study referred to DMT for self-harming behavior and harming other children. The teacher set goals for his DMT to stop self-harming, stop harming other children, and say one good thing about himself. Meekum included a detailed account of what occurred in each session with this student. Data from the teacher indicated that she felt DMT lowered his aggressive behavior. However more sessions were needed to support the findings of the study.

Dance was used as a Tier one, or whole class, intervention in a study on an urban kindergarten classroom. Students participated in dance twice a week for one month. During this time the teacher-researcher collected whole class behavior data as well as individual case study data. Case study students were identified based on disruptive behaviors they exhibited in the classroom.

The research results indicated that dance can be implemented as a Tier One intervention. The behavior data indicated lower reflection and referral rates over the course of the dance curriculum intervention. The lowering of these rates happened for the entire class, not solely the four children identified as case studies. This indicates that dance can be used successfully because it supports improving whole class culture as well as improving individual student behavior. As indicated by the data found in the student emotional self-evaluations, dance can improve student joy at school. This in turn may have an impact on their social-emotional well-being. Students reported being happier at school after participating in dance activities. The interviews as well as observations indicated an increase in teacher-student relationships. Behavior data indicates that negative behaviors decreased. Overall classroom reflection totals decreased, which indicates students were more engaged in classroom activities.

This review of research includes the importance of building strong teacher-student relationships especially with those students who exhibit disruptive behavior. It is important for teachers working in urban settings to share their life experiences and include culturally relevant practices when possible to support relationship building. Teachers should incorporate movement into the classroom even if they are unable to devote full class periods. This can be done in the form of movement breaks but teachers need to participate with the class. Classroom community can be built up by sharing of hobbies and passions between teachers and students. Fecser (2015) stated one of the best things teachers can do for students with trauma is to build a trusting relationship between the adult and the student. Fecser's (2015) statement was supported in the results of this study with an increase of student interaction and inquiry about the teacher and dance. Dance and movement was the medium in which the trusting relationship was strengthened between the teacher-researcher and students.

Schlein, Taft, and Tucker-Blackwell (2013) mentioned in their narrative inquiry-based study that the teacher should be culturally understanding of students with EBD or disruptive behavior. This was also a finding from the data collected, students are from culturally diverse backgrounds where the teacher is within the 1% Caucasian in the classroom. The dance curriculum included teaching about artists of color as well as included dance styles that have different cultural roots. This research allowed for the teacher and students to build relationship and trust that stretched beyond racial background. It allowed the students to see the teacher in a new light. Students began to share more of their outside of school activities and cultures with the teacher among the medium of dance.

Another practical implication is how movement in the classroom is great for students and teachers. Dance provided a physical outlet for students. In the study many students began to ask

for videos or time in class to dance. This is a productive brain break for students and can build community when the teacher joins. It is also something that the class built a shared interest in that can be used as a reward when learning goals for a block had been met. Fecser (2015) also suggested that providing movement breaks in the classroom is a great intervention for students who have trauma but can benefit the class as a whole.

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