
Incorporating High-Leverage Practice 7 in Classroom/Behavior Management Courses: Creating Supportive Learning Environments

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Abstract

In a joint effort, the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) and the Collaboration for Effective Educator Development, Accountability and Reform (CEEDAR) published instructional practice guides for special educators called High-Leverage Practices (McLeskey et al., 2017). These High Leverage Practices focus on four areas of practice (collaboration, assessment, instruction, and social/emotional/behavioral). High Leverage Practice 7 (HLP 7) is under the social/emotional/behavioral domain and guides teachers to establish positive and constructive learning environments for students. For special education training programs, opportunities to focus on HLP 7 can be presented in classroom/behavior management courses as a function of setting up classroom structure (atmosphere, rules, and procedures) that support developing positive, culturally responsive learning environments and student-teacher relationships. This paper provides support for *why* topics should focus on HLP 7 and *how* topics of structure, culturally responsive teaching, student-teacher relationship development, and social emotional learning should be included in classroom/behavior management courses in special education training programs.

Keywords:

behavior management, classroom management, Culturally Responsive Teaching, SEL high-leverage practices, Social Emotional Learning

An essential element of successful teaching, regardless of discipline, is classroom management. Effective classroom management facilitates students' academic achievements, increases social opportunities, and helps create a positive classroom environment (Myers et al., 2017). Classroom management is particularly important for new teachers as there is a direct link between a teacher's inability to manage student behavior and a teacher's job satisfaction and, consequently, the high teacher turnover rate (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Klasen & Chiu, 2010; Myers et al., 2017). For classroom management techniques to be successful, however, educators need to create learning environments that are positive and conducive to the advancement of all students, regardless of their identified backgrounds (e.g., cultural, ethnic, socioeconomic, sexual orientation). In an effort to do this, most preservice special education training programs include at least one course on classroom or behavior management (Oliver & Reschly, 2007).

Classroom/Behavior management has been broadly

defined as creating a positive and respectful environment where students are encouraged to learn (Lewis, 2009). Classroom management has also included arranging the environment to ensure success (e.g., having an organized classroom, clear and clutter-free teacher and student work areas, and explicit rules and procedures; Guardino & Fullerton, 2010). When classroom management techniques are successful, students are able to engage with the course material fully, thus increasing their academic success opportunities. Effective classroom management requires a partnership between teachers and students. To do so, the classroom management systems should reflect and celebrate the ethnic, cultural, contextual, and linguistic diversity of its students.

Classroom Management and High Leverage Practice 7

In 2017, the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) and the Collaboration for Effective Educator Development, Accountability and Reform (CEEDAR)

published guidelines called high-leverage practices (HLPs) to help prepare teachers for classrooms that include a diverse set of learners (McLeskey et al., 2017). HLPs were created to address four main areas of classroom practice for K-12 special educators: assessment, collaboration, instruction, and social/emotional/behavioral. Across four domains (collaboration, assessment, instruction, and social/emotional/behavioral), there are a total of 22 HLPs. As it relates to structuring classroom management, HLP 7 guides teachers in “establishing a consistent, organized, and respectful learning environment” (McLeskey et al., 2017, p. 16).

HLP 7 is considered foundational under the social/emotional/behavioral domain as it sets the stage for other HLPs to be implemented effectively. There are three key components of HLP 7. First, classrooms can be organized, and the classroom’s expectations and rules can be clearly defined and taught. The second key component of HLP 7 advises using a continuum of strategies to acknowledge appropriate behavior with high frequency. Third, HLP 7 recommends teachers optimize instructional time by providing high rates of opportunities to respond (OTR).

HLP 7 also includes guidance on how teachers can carefully plan and be thoughtful of their classroom rules and expectations. For example, teachers are advised to be aware of how a student’s culture, ethnicity, and lived experiences may impact their relationship with the classroom management style and rules. For special education training programs, opportunities to focus on HLP 7 can be presented in classroom/behavior management courses that can help train teachers in developing positive, culturally responsive learning environments and student-teacher relationships.

Teaching Classroom/Behavior Management as Structuring the Learning Environment

Preservice teachers’ exposure to classroom and behavior management skills often occurs during their university training programs. Opportunities to practice specific skills and strategies happen through course content and classroom practical experiences. Special education training program courses on classroom/behavior management incorporate sets of knowledge and skills that focus on elements of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) through readings, lectures, and practical experiences for preservice teachers (Alberto & Troutman, 2013; Lee & Axelrod, 2005; Trump et al., 2018). While this remains true for base content instruction, there has

been a shift over the past few decades to include relationship development and cultural considerations as a part of classroom/behavior management (Levin & Nolan, 2014; Shepherd & Linn, 2014).

HLP 7 supports bridging ABA principles and practices along with developing learning environments that are organized and respectful of learners. This paper details the intersection for providing instruction on classroom/behavior management practices presented in preservice special education preparation courses and concepts on developing culturally responsive classrooms and positive teacher-student relationships. We suggest that university-level courses on classroom/behavior management designed for preservice teachers use a cluster of lectures, content, and activities we term ‘Antecedent Structure’, which supports establishing positive structure and learning environments. Specifically, the authors contend that instruction on Antecedent Structure, with particular focus on Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) and developing positive student/teacher relationships, supports preservice teachers’ understanding of HLP 7 and advances skills in setting up their classroom atmosphere, rules, and procedures for all of their students. Figure 1 diagrams the topics related to Antecedent Structure.

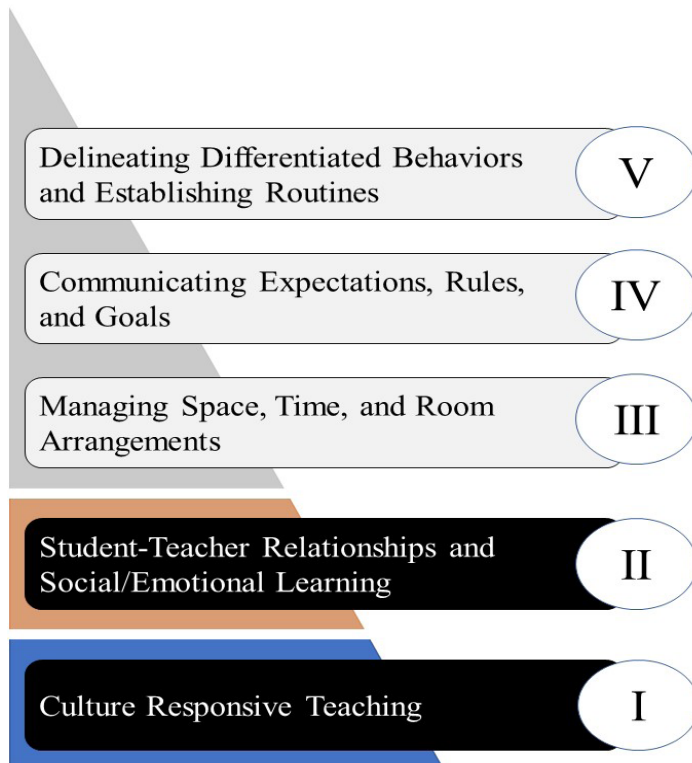
Structure I: Culturally Responsive Teaching

In 2014, for the first time in the history of the United States, the percentage of students who identify as non-White (i.e., Black, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, two or more races) exceeded the numbers of White students. Non-White students now account for over 50 percent of all students enrolled in U.S. schools (McFarland et al., 2017). However, the group of professionals who have served and continue serving these students are predominantly White and non-Hispanic (Billingsley et al., 2019; Nieto et al., 2008). Despite efforts to diversify the profession, limited progress has been achieved. Teaching is still a profession dominated mostly by White females, with 79% of all public-school teachers identifying as White and 76% identifying as female (Hussar et al., 2020).

Differences between teachers and students are especially salient in the area of special education where students of color (i.e., Black, Hispanic, Asian, Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native) make up over 60% of those receiving services for special education (Hussar et al., 2020). Still, less than 20% of special educators belong to one of the aforementioned racial

Figure 1. Topics for Antecedent Structure for a Classroom/Behavior Management Course

Topics of Antecedent Structure



Note: As aligned with the purpose of this paper, only lectures I and II of Antecedent Structure are discussed.

and/or ethnic groups (Billingsley et al., 2019). Disparity of representation can lead to misidentification (over- and under-identification) of students of color in special education (Coutinho et al., 2002; Morgan et al., 2017; Skiba et al., 2006; 2015) and the lack of cultural awareness that is necessary to have the most significant possible impact on students' academic and social abilities (Billingsley et al., 2019; Mahatmya et al., 2016). The sheer number of students of color receiving special education services provides support for teacher training programs to include CRT. Further, as classroom/behavior management skills are essential for successful teaching, CRT can be connected to courses for future special educators that develop classroom and behavior management skills. As part of its main directive, HLP 7 encourages teachers to support respectful learning environments. Understanding and implementing practices that account for the diversity and uniqueness of all students based on their cultural identity adheres to the tenets of HLP 7.

Lecture Points for CRT. CRT practices are key to encouraging positive classroom environments. Four

overarching themes guide teachers who implement CRT approaches (Hammond, 2014). First, teachers who implement CRT need to be aware and mindful of the impact culture and society have in their classrooms and their personal biases and perspectives. Second, they establish learning partnerships that aim to increase the student's ownership in the classroom. Third, students see the classroom as a safe place where mistakes and conflicts can be resolved (Ginsberg, 2015). Finally, teachers select materials and instructional methods that represent and are accessible to their students. Given these tenets, preservice teacher programs incorporating CRT practices in classroom/behavior management courses will need to describe actionable ways teachers can achieve the goals of CRT.

Following a CRT approach to instruction is particularly important in special education given the intersectionality of disability, race, and ethnicity (Banks & Banks, 2001; Crenshaw, 1989). As previously mentioned, there is evidence suggesting a disproportionate representation of students of color in special education. It is hypothesized that this problem could be caused by teachers not receiving enough classroom management training during their preparation (Green & Muñoz, 2016), their limited understanding of what it means to teach in a diverse classroom (Freeman et al., 2014), and subsequently being underprepared to effectively meet the needs of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds with special needs (Mueller et al., 2006).

In addition to being aware and mindful of the role culture and society plays in their classroom, special educators striving for a CRT approach to classroom instruction may also consider the implications a disability diagnosis or special education label has on the child and their family (Gay, 2002). By becoming more culturally competent, teachers will be better equipped to separate diversity from disability and thus decrease the disproportionate representation of students of color in special education. Furthermore, culturally responsive training would teach teachers to recognize the barriers and facilitators to a student's learning and thus provide them with targeted strategies to enhance their learning (Gay, 2002).

As a reminder, CRT is not just a checklist to follow but should be taught as an overarching disposition and approach to teaching and instruction (Aceves, & Orosco, 2014). As suggested by CEEDAR (2021), instruction for teachers (or preservice teachers) learning

about the intersection of CRT and classroom/behavior management (i.e., Culturally Responsive Classroom Management, CRCM) focuses on four tenets and overarching questions for each:

1. Defining CRCM – what are the main components of CRCM and how do they work together?
2. Examining Perceptions – how do we perceive our students and their backgrounds?
3. Using Specific Strategies within CRCM – what are the principles and strategies that work for supporting students?
4. Understanding Outcomes for Students from Using CRCM – how does using CRCM help students?

See Figure 2 for detailed elements of each of the four tenets.

By implementing a culturally responsive approach to teaching and considering the unique role disability plays in their students' lives, special educators can set the foundations that will help them create the organized, respectful, and consistent classroom environments recommended in the high leverage practices. This classroom management approach will benefit all students, regardless of their racial and/or ethnic background.

Structure II: Student-Teacher Relationships and Social Emotional Learning

A key point to highlight for preservice teachers is the importance of student-teacher relationships. Beyond developing rapport with students, teachers need to have an understanding of their students and allow their students to have an understanding of them. Previous research has established the importance of student-teacher relationships and how those relationships influence student outcomes (Cooper & Miness, 2014; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Gallagher et al., 2013; Hamre & Pianta, 2001). Students who develop positive relationships with teachers reduce their odds of school failure and have stronger connections to improving their quality of life. For example, Hamre and Pianta (2001) found that positive student-teacher relationships in early education increased the likelihood of students establishing good work habits and fewer school-based discipline problems. Given that students' self-image and relationship skills are established by having constructive and caring relationships with the adults in their life (Gallagher et al., 2013), the adults they connect with in educational settings can profoundly affect how they

Figure 2. Culturally Responsive Classroom Management Instructional Topics

CRCM Instructional Points

Defining CRCM

- What is CRCM?
- What is diversity?

Examining Perceptions

- What is and how to develop cultural proficiency?
- What is multiculturalism?

Using Research-based Strategies

- What school-wide strategies intersect with CRCM?
- What classroom strategies intersect with CRCM?
- What individual strategies intersect with CRCM?

Understanding Outcomes from CRCM

- What are student outcomes?
- What are teacher outcomes?

develop.

In conjunction with developing positive student-teacher relationships, developing students' social and emotional skills are equally important. In fact, Schonert-Reichl (2015) asserted that along with intellectual development, a high-quality education includes social and emotional teaching and learning. Furthermore, educational systems provide supports for students to develop emotional competencies with skills in self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship development, and decision making; all of which can be considered social and emotional learning (Greenberg et al., 2003). While there is no definitive definition for social and emotional learning (SEL), most explanations include recognizing that SEL is comprised of competencies to be learned that supports (a) emotional and relationship development, (b) empathy learning, and (c) decision making (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2013; Osher et al., 2008; Weissberg et al., 2007). The

essential elements of SEL align with the spirit of HLP 7 in that the focus is on establishing a learning environment that respects students wholly.

For special education teacher training programs, developing coursework in SEL for preservice teachers has been increasingly happening for decades. The importance of providing teachers with the skills to encourage SEL for their students is especially salient for students with special needs “given that the very nature of school-based learning is relational, social and emotional skills create responsive, caring, and inclusive classrooms, and provide a foundation for building and sustaining learning relationships that promote academic success and responsible citizenship” (p.407) as stated by Schonert-Reichl et al. (2015) in their discussion on the need for SEL instructional courses for preservice teachers. Furthermore, Weissberg et al. (2007) provided support for the connection of SEL and classroom/behavior management instruction for preservice teachers asserting that well-managed and supportive learning environments allow students to learn and practice SEL skills. As with CRT, teaching preservice teachers how to develop positive student-teacher relationships with SEL align with the spirit of HLP 7. Creating socially and demotionally respectful classroom environments for students who feel safe and cared for helps maintain organization and keeps the flow of instruction positive.

Lecture Points for Student-Teacher Relationships and SEL. Haring and Phillips (1963) identified a number of specific teacher behaviors that they asserted contribute to creating a structured classroom. Taylor (2016) took the structured classroom concept and combined it with specific teacher behaviors and connected them to social/emotional traits that support positive relationship development. In the context of special educator preparation in classroom management, the suggestions made by Taylor are behavioral in nature (i.e., actionable items), tied to relational outcomes, and parallel the tenets of HLP 7. As previously discussed, HLP 7 has three key competencies: having an organized classroom with clear rules and expectations, using reinforcement to acknowledge student successes (large and small), and giving students OTR during instructional times. The suggestions from Taylor provide a framework for content that can be covered in a classroom/behavior management course to support preservice teachers’ skills in developing student-teacher relationships (see Figure 3).

CASEL provides a number of suggestions on the

content that should be included when developing and teaching a lecture on SEL in a classroom/behavior management course. For example, CASEL (2013) suggested teaching the process of SEL and helping preservice teachers develop the skills, attitudes, and knowledge related to SEL. They also advised that teachers develop skills in SEL that help students to (a) identify and

Figure 3. Student-Teacher Relationships within in Classroom/Behavior Management

Teacher and Student Behaviors in SEL

Limit surprises with predictable routines

- Honesty and Fairness

Co-construct classroom rules with students

- Shared Ownership

Give clear directions and expectations

- Purpose

Discuss positive and negative consequences

- Clarity

Discuss rational for consequences with student

- Mutual Respect

Emphasize self-control and independence

- Mentoring

Emphasize the positive with high expectations

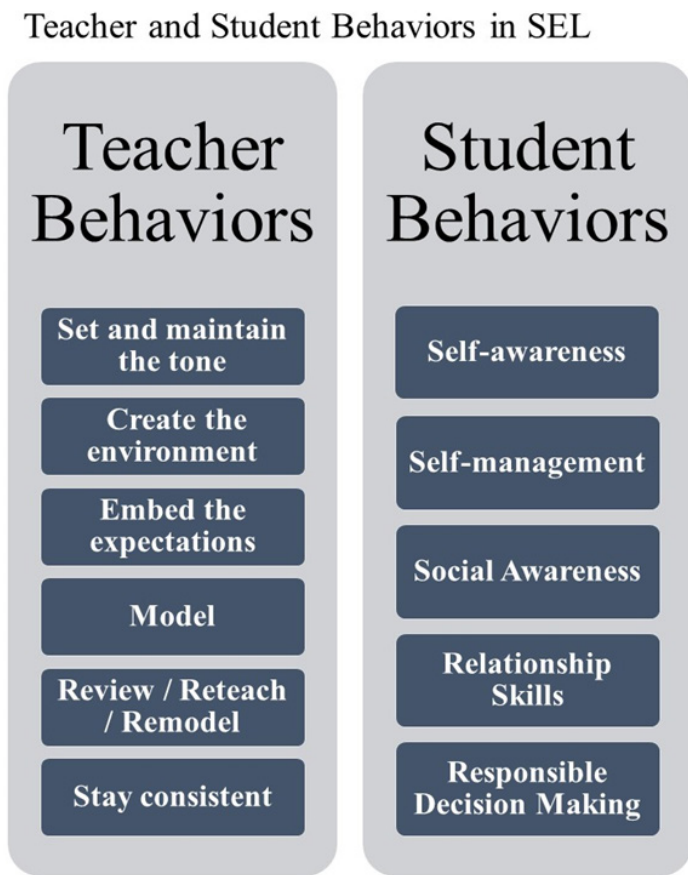
- Collaboration and Support

regulate emotions, (b) develop positive relationships, and (c) make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2013). Specifically, CASEL (2013) identified behaviors for both teachers and students related to SEL (see Figure 4). The authors of the current manuscript suggest that special education teacher training programs incorporate and model the teacher behaviors highlighted by CASEL (2013) and support teachers in learning how to instill the student behaviors in their teaching. We especially support both of these actions within the context of a classroom/behavior management course.

Conclusion

Along with academic skills, social and emotional skills cannot be divorced from the behavior; understanding the realities of the field is essential to special educators and, by default, special education preparation programs. Special education teachers will serve students from backgrounds different than their own. Therefore, special education training programs would be advised to include lessons that emphasize the understanding

Figure 4. Teacher and Student Behaviors for Social Emotional Learning



and implementing dispositions, practices, and strategies that support all students. These learning objectives align squarely with the guides set forth with the HLPs overall and specifically HLP 7. Using Antecedent structure topics in classroom/behavior management courses provides preservice teachers with the structure needed to pair approaches related to structure, CRT, developing student-teacher relationships, and SEL with actionable practices. Given that university training programs are responsible for preparing special educators to be proficient holistic (academically, behaviorally, socially, and emotionally) motivators of students with special needs, the benefits of intersecting HLP 7 with skills that can be learned in a classroom/behavior management course are significant.

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