

Creating the Inviting Classroom Through a Competency-Based Guidance System

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For some years there has been growing interest in meeting both the affective and academic needs of students. For example, Goodwin (1989), Morse (1990), and Hoffman (1991) have supported the need to meet the affective as well as the academic needs of students in elementary schools. This article reports findings of a study that examined the effects of a systematic affective education program on students and teachers in an elementary school.

Background

Gerler and Anderson (1986) indicated that classroom guidance can have a positive influence on children's behavior, prevent problem behaviors, and improve attitudes toward school. A longitudinal study showed that guidance activities could have positive outcomes with student attendance as well (Gerler, 1980). Myrick, Merhill and Swanson (1986) found developmental guidance units to be effective in influencing student attitudes and behaviors.

Gysbers & Henderson (1994) recommended a developmental, competency-based guidance system incorporated as a curriculum component that includes student competencies, student outcomes, and evaluation procedures. Myrick (1993) noted that developmental guidance programs: (1) are for all students, (2) have an organized and

planned curriculum, (3) are sequential and flexible, (4) are an integrated part of the total educational process, (5) involve all school personnel, (6) help students learn more effectively and efficiently, (7) include counselors who provide specialized counseling services and interventions. These research efforts have culminated in several school systems adopting various guidance programs with the intent to maximize the effect on students' affective and academic development.

Purpose

This study used *The Grow With Guidance System* (Radd, 1988a) to examine its influence on classroom climate in the elementary school. The effect of this system was studied in terms of its overall impact on students and teachers' perceptions. *The Grow With Guidance System* is a comprehensive, developmental, prescriptive, competency-based guidance system that identifies student competencies, assesses outcomes, and evaluates procedures. The system is based on a participant/learner model founded on self-concept theory (Purkey, 1988), cooperation (Johnson, Houlbec, Johnson, & Roy, 1984) and invitational learning (Purkey & Stanley, 1991).

The Grow With Guidance System includes a: (1) positive classroom behavior plan, (2) positive self-talk and self-picture plan, (3) prescriptive/developmental curriculum system that includes a needs assessment, called *The Children's Affect Needs Assessment* (CANA), and an (4) implementation plan for staff development that includes a staff assessment survey taken by students, called *The Invitational Teaching Survey, Primary & Intermediate* (ITS-P&I). The K-5 curriculum includes activities in the strands of self, other awareness, self-control, decision making/problem solving, group cooperation, and career. Each activity includes the particular competency to be mastered. Each component of the program is based in a self-concept process, called the Self-Concept Series. Also, each

component is interactive and necessary for the system to work. (Brightman & Radd, 1985b)

Hypotheses

Two hypotheses were formed as the basis for this research:

1. There will be a significant difference between the invitational teaching practices of teachers who use *The Grow with Guidance System* and teachers who do not, as perceived by students.
2. There will be a significant difference between the affective development of students exposed to *The Grow with Guidance System* and students who are not exposed, as reported by students.

Method

An elementary school in a suburban school district near a major metropolitan area volunteered to participate in the study. The school is small to moderate in size and includes grades' kindergarten to fifth grade. The school population is primarily Caucasian with a wide range of social and economic levels represented. The researcher was not associated professionally with the school, but was located in a proximity for ongoing support and monitoring.

Participants

A total of 224 students and 11 teachers in grades' 1 through 5 of the school were included in the study. The total student population was randomly assigned into 11 classrooms. These were intact classrooms and represented a random, heterogeneous sample of students by grade level. Classes were assigned randomly to experimental and control groups. All of the teachers were female.

Instruments

Two instruments were used to assess students' perceptions, the ITS-P&I (Radd, 1989) and the CANA (Brightman & Radd, 1985a). Self-Report Questionnaires for teachers were also used. The reliability for the ITS-P&I was calculated using the Chronbach Alpha coefficient procedure. The reliability is .89 on the primary level and .86 on the intermediate level.

To develop the ITS-P&I for students in grades' 1-6, questions on the Invitational Teaching Survey (ITS, Amos, Purkey, & Tobias, 1984) were reworded and evaluated for the best possible organizational plan for children. Validity of the Invitational Teaching Survey (ITS) had been established on adult nursing students by Amos, et al. (1984). This researcher worked with Dr. Amos to establish organizational guidelines and a validating panel of experts. The panel of experts consisted of professionals who either worked in the development of the invitational teaching model or were leaders who used this model through application and training.

The ITS-P&I measures inviting teacher practices in the classroom. Invitational education is a perceptually based, self-concept approach to the teaching-learning process anchored on four propositions: (a) that people are able, valuable, and responsible and should be treated accordingly, (b) that education should be an activity, (c) that people possess untapped potential in all areas of human development, and, (d) that potential can best be realized by places, policies, and programs that are specifically designed to invite development, and by people who are intentionally inviting with themselves and others, personally and professionally (Purkey & Novak, 1984).

The ITS-P&I follows the format of the ITS (Amos, et al. 1984) and consists of 43 items using Likert-type scales to measure professionally

and personally inviting teacher practices. It consists of five subscores, two of which (commitment and consideration) are judged as personally inviting, and three other subscores (coordination, proficiency, and expectations) that are judged as professionally inviting. "Professionally Inviting Teacher Practices" are behaviors, such as coordination, proficiency, and expectation, that summon students to learn and appreciate course content. "Personally Inviting Teacher Practices" are behaviors, such as commitment and consideration, that summon students to feel good about themselves and their abilities in general. "Intentionality" is a construct that means teachers are aware of specific practices and behave consistently in an inviting manner.

The Children's Affective Needs Assessment (CANA, Brightman & Radd, 1985a) evaluates affective needs based on students' perceptions in the areas of self, other awareness, self-control, decision making/problem solving, and group cooperation. Concurrent validity between teacher and student self-reports for the CANA is .76 and reliability coefficients range from .75 to .93 for grades 1 through 5. This instrument gives a general overview of the affective functional level of each student and classroom. The CANA consists of 42 items. Responses are either positive or negative with percentage results given for each strand. Descriptions of the five strands are:

Self: Children's ability to define and describe feelings related to personal experience; children's conscious activity in relation to personal feelings; their opinion of and attitudes toward self; their willingness to accept self and find a place in the group in a positive way.

Other Awareness: Children's awareness of the needs of others, willingness to acknowledge the needs and to function accordingly; their ability to define and describe feelings in others related to specific experience; their awareness of uniqueness and differences of people.

Self-Control: Children's awareness of personal limitations and needs, and the extent to which they can assess abilities and skills; awareness of their own ability to set and remain within limits or boundaries and establish values; their ability to display acceptable social behavior.

Decision Making/Problem Solving: Children's ability to make choices from alternatives based on awareness of consequences; their awareness of personal and family values.

Group Cooperation: Children's perceptions of how they relate to working in a group in reference to the other members.

Design

Eleven classes in the volunteer elementary school were randomly assigned to experimental (classes = 7) and control groups (classes = 4). There were 2 experimental groups (XE₁ & XE₂) and one control group (X_c). The experimental groups experienced either an intensified or moderate system (moderate was one activity every week to every other week plus using all program components; intensified was two to three activities every week plus using all program components). The control group experienced a regular classroom environment.

Each grade level, grades 1 through 5, had at least one experimental group. The four classes of the control group were in grades 1, 2, 3, and 5. Each group was pre- and post-tested using the ITS-P&I and the CANA. At post-testing teachers completed the Staff Self-Report Questionnaire. The time frame between the pre-and post-test was 3 months.

Procedures

Two teacher in-service programs were conducted: a three hour in-service for all research groups and an additional three hour inservice

with the two experimental groups. These took place at the beginning of the study, prior to data collection. The experimental groups XE1 and XE2 met as needed throughout the semester. The experimental groups logged the activities selected.

The instruments were administered by the researcher or trained assistants. The participating students were permitted to seek clarification of questions on the instruments. Participating teachers and students were assigned a code number to assure confidentiality.

Analysis

Data were subjected to an F-ratio to determine whether the experimental groups differed from the control group. Differences between the intensified, moderate, and control group post-test scores were also analyzed as were the self-evaluations by teachers at the conclusion of the study.

Results

The following results were found to be statistically significant at the .05 level:

1. Teachers who used the experimental program, *The Grow With Guidance System*, were perceived by students as utilizing greater invitational teaching practices. See Table 1.
2. Students in the experimental groups demonstrated more positive self-control, as measured by *The Children's Affect Needs Assessment* (CANA).

TABLE 1

Invitational Teaching Survey

	df	F	p
Total			
X1, X2, XC	3,212	13.718	.0001*
X1, X2	1,13	3.667	.0577
X1, XC	1,93	19.628	.0001*
X2, XC	1,128	37.825	.0001*
Commitment			
X1, X2, XC	3,221	13.978	.0001*
X1, X2	1,138	4.569	.0343
X1, XC	1,94	17.7	.0001*
X2, XC	1,135	39.123	.0001*
Consideration			
X1, X2, XC	3,221	14.288	.0001*
X1, X2	1,138	3.504	.0633
X1, XC	1,95	21.716	.0001*
X2, XC	1,134	44.053	.0001*
Coordination			
X1, X2, XC	3,221	14.461	.0001*
X1, X2	1,138	4.602	
X1, XC	1,96	22.007	.0001*
X2, XC	1,133	39.827	.0001*
Proficiency			
X1, X2, XC	3,221	15.031	.0001*
X1, X2	1,139	6.044	
X1, XC	1,96	18.249	.0001*
X2, XC	1,134	41.41	.0001*
Expectancy			
X1, X2, XC	3,226	13.109	.0001*
X1, X2	1,142	1.854	.1755
X1, XC	1,97	22.09	.0001*

*(p<.05)

Table 2 reflects the findings relative to the affective function of each student in the study. Only one of the five areas measured by the

CANA, Self-Control, indicated a significant difference. Therefore, only that subscale is presented in the table.

On Self-Control, the experimental groups XE1 and XE2 (teachers employing the intensified and moderate system) differed significantly from the control group. This finding suggests that students in XE1 and XE2 saw themselves as being more responsible and practicing safer behaviors than did the control group, an increasingly important behavior in today's world.

TABLE 2
Children's Affect Needs Assessment - Self-Control

	df	F	p
Self-Control			
X1, X2, XC	3,224	3.286	.0214*
X1, X2	1,141	0.089	.7661
X1, XC	1,95	6.161	.0148*
X2, XC	1,95	7.898	.0057*

*(p<.05)

3. Teachers using the experimental program in an intensified manner reported feeling better about themselves, feeling better about their teaching, making changes to their teaching approach, and they reported better teacher-student interaction. See Table 3.

Discussion

This research suggests that a competency-based guidance system might warrant consideration as a strategy for integrating guidance into classroom management and curriculum to create and maintain an inviting classroom climate. In this study, *The Grow With Guidance System* (Radd, 1988b) was used in experimental classes and showed significant differences when compared with classes that did not use

this approach. *The Grow With Guidance System* essentially provides a systematic process for teacher-student interaction, which may result in an inviting learning climate.

TABLE 3
Self Report Evaluation - Staff

	df	F	p
Teacher Question 1	Have the Grow With Guidance activities helped you?		
X1, X2, Xc	1,100	6.97	
X1 vs X2, Xc	2,100		.1493
Teacher Question 2	Do you feel better about yourself		
X1, X2, Xc		8.6202	
X1 vs X2, Xc	2,10		.0229*
Teacher Question 3	Do you feel better about your teaching?		
X1, X2, Xc	1,10	8.6202	
X1 vs X2, Xc	2,10		.0229*
Teacher Question 4	Do you get along better with your students?		
X1, X2, Xc	1,100	8.6202	
X1 vs X2, Xc	2,10		.0229*
Teacher Question 5	Can you handle problems better?		
X1, X2, Xc	1,100	2.79	
X1 vs X2, Xc	2,10		.0716
Teacher Question 6	Have you changed anything in your teaching as a result of this approach?		
X1, X2, Xc	1,10	8.62	
X1 vs X2, Xc	2,10		.0001*

*(p<.05)

The data in Table 1 indicate that teachers with only three hours of training who used this approach were seen by students as behaving significantly different from those teachers without training and who did not use the program. Specifically, 18 of the 23 comparisons analyzed indicate a significant difference. This suggests that there may be

a reciprocal relationship between what teachers implement with students and their own personal and professional growth.

The data in Table 2 includes information regarding significant changes in student self-control as reported on the CANA. The other areas of Self, Other Awareness, Decision Making/Problem Solving, and Group Cooperation did not indicate significant changes. A possible explanation for this may be that the 3 month time frame for the study did not provide students with enough time to significantly change areas of intrinsic, developmental growth that are more longitudinal in nature. It is encouraging that students began to apply a greater understanding of the five areas in order to improve their self-control.

Future research may want to focus on the amount of training and the personal characteristics involved with teachers who use intensified guidance practices. For example, the results of teachers' self-evaluation following the study suggest that teachers who are trained in using systematic guidance programs differ in their perceptions about themselves, teaching, and interactions with students from colleagues who are not trained. In addition, this study found that teachers who use intensified practices in systematic programs differ from those who use moderate practices. These findings may be important considering the increased focus on human relations for teachers. For example, the state of Nebraska now requires that all teachers have a course in human relations before they receive teacher certification.

Although these findings may have been influenced by the short time frame of the study (3 months), the limited amount of time devoted to staff training (3 hours) and the absence of the researcher from the school (limited the interactions between the teachers and researcher), the results do suggest support for *The Grow With Guidance System* or a similar model.

On the basis of these findings the following recommendations are offered to enhance development of an inviting classroom/school climate:

1. Incorporate a positive behavior plan based in democratic principles in each classroom.
2. Examine ways that classroom policy and procedures may become intentionally inviting with students, and more congruent in terms of teacher-student interaction.
3. Consider administering the ITS-P&I or a similar instrument to receive feedback from students about the classroom climate and assess their feelings about being in school.
4. Support teachers by providing training in skills such as effective communication, facilitative teaching, and other human relations skills.
5. Develop a comprehensive guidance curriculum for all students. Present a guidance curriculum where students are actively involved; use cooperative learning and role-play when possible. Help students apply guidance skills in life experiences and report their results back to the classroom group.
6. Assist students in applying guidance skills within the school setting. For example, if you have taught the students how to use "I Messages," encourage students to incorporate them into academic as well as other experiences during the school day.
7. Encourage students and teachers to assess ways that their self-talk and self-pictures are congruent with their desired goals.
8. Incorporate self-concept learning experiences into every component of your systematic guidance program. Include these three steps of the self-concept series when possible: (1) All people are valuable (unconditional acceptance); (2) We demonstrate that we are remembering our value and the value of others by choosing behavior that is helpful and not hurtful to self and others; and, (3) We are responsible and accountable for our choices.

With the desire of society to meet the affective and academic needs of students, more educators have explored ways that those goals can be met. As a result, more educators recognize the importance of an inviting classroom in meeting affective and academic objectives. As demonstrated by this study, the use of a systematic guidance program may be a viable way to create and maintain a consistent and intentional inviting classroom for students and teachers.

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