

PSI PARADIGM[®]

A PSI Communique for the Educational Community

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In THIS Issue

PSI is dedicated to the continual professional development of our own staff and the staff in the schools in which we are privileged to work. In addition to the varied professional development programs we offer our client schools, we provide on-going training to PSI staff on the latest innovations and most effective techniques.

This issue of Paradigm is dedicated to a review of Special Education topics presented at our fall training program for PSI psychologists, speech therapists, intervention specialists, ESL staff and foreign language instructors. Megan Shelby, PhD, of the Cuyahoga County ESC, presented the latest on PBIS and FBA. Carl Weitman, PhD, a long-time PSI psychologist, addressed the intriguing field of Executive Brain Functioning which is so crucial to the students we serve. And finally, Marilee L. Fini M.A. CCC-SLP, who has been associated with PSI for many years, presented the latest findings and techniques on the challenging issue of stuttering.

SPECIAL Education Matters!

A Special Education Newsletter for Educators

The 4th “R” Fostering Resiliency in Special Education Students

Colleen Lorber, PhD, PSI Director of Educational Support Services

In addition to the stresses that are brought about by students’ lives changing, their needs are changing too. More students today are neglected at home. Fundamental family rituals such as eating dinner together or working together on homework are often absent because of changing family structures or economic limitations. More students are depressed and suicides are on the rise. The need for social services is greater than ever before. When these issues are coupled with the challenges that can accompany being a special education student, it is clear that students need to learn to be advocates for themselves. They must learn how to ask for help, plan for their futures, and communicate sensibly with adults and peers in their lives. Most important, perhaps, students need to develop a sense of hope and a desire for a bright future. Focus must be placed on developing the 4th “R” which is resiliency.

Resiliency is the ability to “bounce back,” to recover from a change, illness, or misfortune. Everyone has potential to become resilient, but few know how. It becomes the educator’s job, therefore, to create the kind of environment and learning activities that build students’ ability to bounce back.

Research shows that children who are resilient tend to be:

- Socially competent—they have the ability to elicit positive responses from others, establishing nourishing relationships with both adults and peers.
- Problem solvers—they envision themselves as being in control, as having the ability to plan, and as being resourceful enough to know when and how to seek help from others.
- Autonomous—they have a sense of their own identity, an ability to act independently and to exert some control over their environment.
- Goal-oriented—they have a sense of purpose. Resilient children have educational aspirations and are persistent.

These qualities flourish in a caring and supportive school and classroom environment. Teachers and other educators can incorporate resilience-building lessons within the curriculum. Some techniques that PSI staff can assist you with are as follows:

1. **Use a variety of instructional approaches:**
 - Particularly utilizing those that are student-led and interest-based, builds on students’ intrinsic motivation.

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Meghan Shelby, PhD, NCSP
Cuyahoga County ESC

Maximizing Positive Behavior

At PSI's Fall Training Meeting, it was clear to the audience of school psychologists, speech therapists, and educational specialists that school achievement is possible only when there are effective solutions for behavior management. The group was trained by Dr. Meghan Shelby who quoted a typical teacher's lament, **"If they'd only behave, I could teach more!"**

Dr. Shelby's presentation dealt with PBIS, standing for Positive Behavioral Intervention Supports, a program designed to build positive change from negative situations. **By law: Each school district shall implement positive behavior intervention and supports on a system-wide basis.** PBIS offers a framework that diminishes negative behavior by engaging students and offering the social tools needed to improve the school environment.

Reinforcing what is positive with students rather than punishment works by over a 4-1 ratio. Used effectively, PBIS will reduce both the student dropout and discipline rate. The idea is that you can teach behavior like you do academics. If you make a mistake in math, you aren't held responsible. You do it until it's right. The same applies to behavior.

The research on PBIS has been favorable, showing reduction in problem and bullying behavior, reduction in staff turnover, while affording increases in academic performance, perceptions of safety and teacher efficiency.

Functional Behavior Assessment, FBA, was covered in the second part of Dr. Shelby's presentation. FBA is a model of problem solving geared upon why a student exhibits negative behavior. It is designed to identify why such negative behavior is happening, using collected information to provide strategies for improvement. All behavior is learned including negative behavior. Examples are accidental rewards for misbehavior, negative reinforcement and inadvertent social attention, among others.

FBA, like PBIS, is required by law, although you can conduct an FBA at any time it is needed. It means assigning resources to an intervention with a data-driven hypothesis that carries hoped-for improvements. Why is a student acting out? Does he or she know what the behavioral expectations are? Does a student have anxiety issues? What is happening on the playground, in the halls, in the school bus? Does everyone feel safe? An FBA plan collects information about the behavior and its functions, develops a plan of intervention, implements the plan, and evaluates the outcome. In sum, it is a strategy that offers alternative solutions for these complex issues, all under the school's control. It is practical in nature, looking at things that can be changed and improved upon.

You can't just resort to the punishment side of the equation. By using communication, both PBIS and FBA engage students, teachers, administrators, parents and the community. Problems can too often arise if youthful energy is misused. Recognizing and building upon what students are doing right, these programs open channels for changing the social dynamic.

PSI has PBIS trainers available for your school. If you are interested, contact Karen McKelvey at karenmckelvey@psi-solutions.org.

PSI Supervisors Participate in Continuing Education and Training

Colleen Lorber, PhD



PSI Staff frequently attend state and national conferences to further educate themselves on the most up to date information in special education.

Recently, PSI staff members attended the ODE/OEC's Special Education Leadership Conference held in Columbus, which focused on "Achieving Balance: Leading Improvement for Children with Disabilities While Managing Compliance." This pre-conference session provided excellent resources on "What the Courts are Saying About Special Education," including the 100 most important legal decisions of 2013 and the hot-topic cases of the summer of 2013. Another important session attended by PSI staff included an update on Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) process, in which staff was offered clarification on how to follow this newly mandated ODE procedure as a special education teacher or LEP (Limited English Proficient) teacher. PSI staff will be following best practices for this new mandate.

A number of current PSI staff attended "DSM 5: Changes-An Overview" presented by Dr. Ben Kearney of Ohio Guidestone and held at the Lorain SST. Dr. Kearney offered a comprehensive overview of the changes in the DSM that may affect special education in the schools.

PSI will be updating its entire staff on the information gained through these trainings via PSI newsletters and workshops.

If you or your staff are interested in updates in these areas, feel free to contact PSI for more information.

The Executive Brain

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“Executive Function” is a relatively new term (in neuropsychology) for the way that the brain gathers information, stores it, and organizes it, then uses it to draw conclusions, makes decisions, self-regulate emotions, and regulates its relationships with the world, using a variety of skills, including deductive logic, inductive logic and intuition.

Despite older views, the brain’s functional skills aren’t controlled by autonomous regions e.g. the right vs. left brain. The reality is that one region in the brain, called the prefrontal cortex, acts as an “orchestra conductor” to coordinate the work of widely dispersed regions and cell assemblies, dispersed across the four quarters of the outer cortex of the brain, and intricately connected to inner and lower regions.

The brain operates as a high-speed coordinated unit, uses electro-chemical signals to communicate among its regions, and while those regions do have specialized functions, they do work in phase with other regions, and they mature at different rates in young children.

For example, the right hemisphere tends to develop earlier than the left hemisphere, and it tends to operate more intuitively, whereas the left hemisphere develops later, operates more methodically, and “fine tunes itself” in small increments as it matures. Throughout the lifespan, people typically tend to learn new skills within their right hemispheres, and then they transfer those skill sets to the left hemisphere to be integrated with information that is already known, after which the information and skills are codified, perfected, spoken, or otherwise used “in real life.” This is a continuous process, with continuous update.

Importantly, it is the brain’s “conductor” (prefrontal cortex) that fully matures in young

adulthood, after the rest of the brain, and this accounts for many of the social and cognitive mistakes for which adolescents are so well known, which is why they need more coaching and “goal correction” than adults. Ironically, at the other end of life, the brain’s “conductor” is also the first neural region to become impaired (“tangles and plaques”) in those elderly citizens who develop the various dementias.

Contrary to previous views, children do learn (intuitively) to use surprisingly sophisticated executive functions e. g. “parallel play,” from early childhood, as they fulfill their most important missions in life: to “get along” with peers, just as they learn to please, comply with, and satisfy the adults who are crucially important to them.

Neuroscientists, including neuropsychologists, and other rehabilitations specialists, have learned to evaluate the brain’s executive function, developmentally and with regard to varieties of injury e.g. damage caused by concussion, with an eye toward how to promote its normal development, and its compensatory skills and/or its recovery from injury. Accurate evaluations can also serve as guideposts to correct medical management for various “Executive Disorders,” including the Attention Deficit Disorders.

Educators have likewise learned to evaluate the brain’s developing function as a guide for the creation of curriculum, “special education,” and emotional self-regulation. It helps to know when different executive functions at what level of complexity “come on line,” and it helps to know how to teach or promote these functions, including “good judgment.” The reality is that no IEP is “worth its salt” unless executive function has been taken into account.

The 4th “R” (Continued from page 1)

- Ask students to work in groups. Cooperative learning allows students to socialize, bounce ideas off their peers, and make decisions based on criteria they develop together.
- Use a variety of assessment strategies, giving students different ways to demonstrate learning.

2. Give students time to reflect:

- Reflection helps students understand and appreciate the purpose of what they are learning.
- Have them create portfolios of their work and progress.
- Teach them how to develop learning plans so they become responsible for their own progress in the future.

3. Communicate often with parents:

Frequent communication among students, parents, and teachers helps young people establish positive relationships with adults and creates a caring and supportive environment.

4. Use humor in the classroom:

Humor allows people to laugh together—and people who laugh together are more willing to trust one another. This trust helps build a caring and supportive environment and ultimately bolsters a student’s willingness to participate. Being able to laugh at oneself is also a powerful way to deal with bullying, a problem that many special education students have to deal with.

5. Make learning active and hands-on:

Using active lessons has proven to be one of the most effective strategies to increase and maintain a high amount of student participation. Students are actively engaged, willing to reflect, and often discuss what they did in class with other students.

(Based on concepts from: October 2001 | Volume 5 | Number 2:
What Should We Teach? Ryan Johnson)



Recipients of 35 Years of Service Award:
(L to R) John Grimm, Sandra Mackemull,
and Eric Wonderly

Overcoming the Impossible

Marilee L. Fini, MA, CCC-SLP
PSI Speech/Language Therapist



A child who stutters will face many challenges that seem overwhelming. Medical research hasn't determined what causes stuttering, but Prof. Fini, who stutters herself, suggested

ways to cope and overcome these challenges. Despite her stuttering, she teaches public speaking, gives speaking workshops and provides strategies for school-age children to overcome its negative emotions and beliefs. A stutterer can view the world of speaking as impossible to overcome. As was shown in the presentation, the impossible is indeed very possible.

Prof. Fini's own stuttering problem started at age four, with therapy beginning at age seven. In the interim, the common view was that "she'd outgrow it." Therapy continued from age seven to adulthood, concentrating on the physical aspect not the emotional. There also was therapy at school, all to no avail. She thought: bad talker equals bad person.

Life changed 360 degrees upon joining NSA, the National Stuttering Association, a self-help organization. This proved to be a source of help and hope, showing that people who stutter were great communicators. Stuttering was not the end of the world but rather a new field to conquer.

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In time, Prof. Fini started a private practice. Why not---who better to handle this issue! She began educating the public, got a degree in Speech Pathology, became a consultant and service provider for PSI, and is now a college professor who teaches public speaking.

Most often stuttering is emotionally based and built upon fear. If handled by acknowledging this fact, coping strategies and techniques can be employed. These focus on opportunities not obstacles, concentrating on what's working with the belief, "Yes I stutter, but I can work around it." Having the courage to try goes hand-in-hand with the courage to make missteps along the way and try again.

Regarding school-age children, it's imperative to know what each child is all about individually. Prof. Fini begins with a slow and simple rate of sentence structure, appropriate phrasing with intervals and an easy, relaxed pace. Videos are also used to not only show what the student is doing but also to get used to being in a presentation mode.

People who stutter are concerned about the reaction they will receive. One technique for facing this fact is freezing the moment, which focuses awareness on why and what is happening. The purpose is to relax and deal with the emotionality. Another, ironically, is voluntarily stuttering on purpose, using incongruity to turn a mountain into an entertaining molehill.

Someone who stutters can readily feel humiliated. Putting it in an unthreatening, humorous context can remove the sting. Ever hear of awards for the scariest stutter, the shortest stutter or the longest stutter? Prof. Fini employs fun and laughter to trump fear.

From USA TODAY

Advancements in Autism Science

By Candice Evans

Autism is not just one thing. Some researchers have even compared it to conditions like cancer -- there are many possible causes, and the autism science community is hoping to pin down its etiology and hopefully find a cure or the best treatment possible. It's called the "autism spectrum" for a reason, and the term encompasses a great variety of disabilities and abilities.

With the **CDC's announcement** that an estimated one in 88 children has autism comes an urgent drive to solve the autism mystery. The research community is looking at brain scans as a means of determining what goes wrong in early brain development.

Most children with **autism** are not diagnosed until about age 4, but we know that early intervention is often the key to a successful life. Researchers suggest that in a decade, autism science will be advanced enough to diagnose autism much earlier.

A decade might seem like a long time, especially for parents who really want results now. However, researchers do suggest that their findings from these brain studies will also help individuals with autism even in their adolescent years. Some recent research also points to the idea of "**late bloomers**," meaning many children with autism "outgrow" their symptoms or show improvements even into their teen years.

Link to **more** of this great article from USA Today and SpecialNeeds.com: <http://www.specialneeds.com/children-and-parents/autism/advancements-autism-science>.

PSI provides a wide variety of school health, special education, ESL, foreign language and intervention services.

Contact us for more information.



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