

Classroom Curricula

Curricula are classroom-based instruction programs designed to teach students factual information; increase their awareness of social influences to engage in misbehavior; expand their repertoires for recognizing and appropriately responding to risky or potentially harmful situations (e.g., drug use, gang involvement, violence); increase their appreciation for diversity in society; improve their moral character; improve conflict resolution skills; and encourage accountability.

A curriculum is a way to organize and systematize the delivery of program components. A curriculum eases dissemination and encourages fidelity to a program's goals and objectives. Across the phases of the youth services continuum, from prevention to rehabilitation, curricula have proven to be an effective means for delivering concepts to encourage optimum developmental outcomes for youth. While many curricula focus on preventing violence, conduct problems, juvenile delinquency, adult criminality, and substance abuse, core goals of these programs tend to be the promotion of cognitive-, social-, and emotional competence.

Schools have traditionally been the arena for prevention programs in general and for prevention curricula in particular. Schools provide an environment other than the home or the community for the generalization and stabilization of behaviors and cognitions. The school can offer an excellent social context for supporting the learning and practice of more adaptive and prosocial forms of interaction (Fergusson and Lynskey 1998; Gottfredson 1998; Tremblay, Masse, Perron, and LeBlanc 1992).

Types of Curricula

Universal curricula that target elementary school children include interventions to reduce children's off-task or aggressive classroom behavior and to increase their basic academic skills and socially competent behaviors. Academic and social skills predict better short- and long-term outcomes (Coie and Krehbiel 1984; Ferrer-Wreder et al. 2003; Finn, Pannozzo, and Voelkl 1995). If teachers devote less time to correcting behavioral problems in the classroom, they have more time to devote to their traditional mission of promoting academic achievement. Therefore, prevention-oriented initiatives designed to reduce children's disruptive or off-task classroom behavior have multiple benefits that generalize to the entire learning environment (Ferrer-Wreder et al. 2003; Nelson 1996). An example of curricula developed to target classroom behaviors is Linking the Interests of Families and Teachers (LIFT).

Other curricula have been developed or expanded to target the whole school environment. Many of these were developed with the goal of promoting a peaceful environment where young people, teachers, administrators and staff all work toward creating an optimum learning environment. Key components of effective school-wide prevention curricula involve having clearly defined goals and objectives understood by all and delivered by well-trained teachers in a developmentally and

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culturally sensitive manner (Quinn et al. 1998). Positive Action is an example of an exemplary K-12 curriculum that has shown effectiveness improving achievement scores, attendance, and self-concept and for reducing drug use, violence, and other problem behaviors.

Schools have also traditionally been the site of alcohol and drug education as well as sex education. Problem behaviors such as alcohol use or risky sexual behaviors often begin during the school-age years (Stovell 1999). Taking these factors into account, many believe that implementing prevention programs in the school setting increases the chance of forestalling the onset, ameliorating the severity, or diverting the long-term consequences of problem behaviors.

Drug prevention efforts have relied largely on classroom curricula, usually designed for elementary and middle school children (Dusenbury and Falco 1997). The nation's schools spend \$125 million on drug abuse prevention curricula each year however many of these may not be effective in preventing substance abuse (Dusenbury and Falco 1997). Drug and alcohol abuse prevention curricula have traditionally been based on pure information dissemination. Previous evaluations show that this didactic approach may be effective at transmitting information regarding drug and alcohol abuse however it is not effective at changing the underlying attitudes and behaviors (Sherman 2000; Gottfredson 1998; Botvin, Botvin and Ruchlin 1998; Sherman et al. 1998).

Outcome Evidence

A review of the literature in the drug abuse prevention field suggests certain types of school-based curricula can effectively reduce substance abuse in adolescence (Botvin and Botvin 1992; Dusenbury and Falco 1997; Tobler and Stratton 1997). Efficacious prevention curricula consist of several key elements. Curricula delivered in an interactive format with smaller groups of young people have been shown to produce strong and lasting positive results (Tobler and Stratton 1997). Effective curricula gives students the tools to recognize internal pressures like stress or anxiety and external pressures like peer attitudes and advertising that may influence them to use alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs. Following this, another useful component is helping students develop and practice personal, social, and refusal skills in order to resisting these influences effectively (Dusenbury and Falco 1997). Changing perceptions of friends' tolerance of drug use was a substantial mediator of program effects on drug use (MacKinnon et al. 1991).

Curricula are not only employed in schools but can successfully be implemented in and across multiple contexts. For instance BUILD, is a curriculum that has been implemented in a juvenile detention center. The curriculum focuses on reducing violence, delinquency, and gang related behaviors with the overall goal of reducing recidivism. One independent evaluation of BUILD's program found that it was extremely well implemented and had a significant effect on juvenile detainees' recidivism rates (Lurigio et al. 2000).

Gottfredson (1998) identified comprehensive instructional programs that focus on a range of social competency skills (e.g., developing self-control, stress management, responsible decision making, social problem-solving, and communication skills) and that are delivered by well-trained providers over a long period of time to continually reinforce skills as effective techniques for preventing crime and delinquency.

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