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The Effects of Competition in the K-12 School Setting and its Relationship to Behavior Modification

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THE EFFECTS OF COMPETITION IN THE K-12 SCHOOL SETTING AND ITS
RELATIONSHIP TO BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION

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requirements for the Master of Science Degree in
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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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Project Title

This is to certify that the Capstone Project of
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Abstract

This paper will focus on considerations for school counselors in their use of competition in the school setting, and specifically how behavioral modification may impact competition and student behavior. The first section will include information on where competition occurs in schools, and whom it can involve such as teachers, students, staff, coaches and administrators and it's effects on student behavior. The second section of this paper will focus on behavior modification and how it can be used when talking with students about competition. The last part of the paper will address considerations for the school counselor and how they can use competition and behavior modification in the school setting most effectively.

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Competition, like many other factors in primary and secondary schools, will affect each student differently. For some students, it may cause anxiety or stress, while for others, it might motivate them to excel. Therefore, school personnel such as teachers and coaches should be thoughtful about their use of competition in schools. School personnel should also consider how competition from parents affects students, as well as how competition between friends and siblings affects student behavior. If used appropriately competition can become a tool for motivation in the school setting. School counselors specifically can be an important resource for school personnel in working with students and their behavior when competition is involved.

This paper will discuss the role of competition in a school setting, and how it may affect students' behavior both negatively and positively. Particularly, this paper will focus on how competition can motivate students, as well as how it can be detrimental to students in K-12 schools. A discussion of ways in which school counselors can support students who are working through issues stemming from an overly competitive environment will be shared. How school counselors can incorporate teachers, staff, parents, administrators and community members to support positive behavior and competition in the school will be explained. In addition, school counselors' use of behavior modification in schools in relation to competition will be examined.

Literature Review

This author will discuss competition in a school setting in the context of: where it can occur, whom it involves and what issues it can cause. An overly competitive environment can lead to cognitive distortions (Shields & Bredemeier, 2010), self-esteem issues (Boyll, 2013), self-harm (Gilbert et al, 2009), depression (Gilbert et al, 2009), anxiety (Gilbert et al, 2009), stress (Gilbert et al, 2009) and bullying (Shields & Bredemeier, 2010), but when used in specific contexts, a competitive environment can also motivate students. Therefore, the use of competitive activities in schools needs careful thought and intentional planning to implement.

Where Competition Occurs at School

The social arena, where students tend to make friends, is one of the areas of competition where it can be observed in schools. However, the social arena and the academic arena in schools are intertwined and one can affect the other. This mesh of the social and the academic can be explored through the use of Erikson's psychosocial stages of development. Students are not just developing academically in school but they are also developing socially. Social skills are being learned and developed at the same time that students are learning their ABCs. This mix of social skills and academic knowledge plays an important role in the area of competition with the students peers.

According to Erikson's fourth psychosocial stage, industry vs. inferiority, "children must master important skills social and academic skills and keep up with their peers; otherwise, they will feel inferior" (Sigelman & Rider, 2006, p.32). This stage happens between ages six to twelve. The next stage in Erikson's psychosocial stages is identity vs. role confusion, which occurs between twelve and twenty years old. In this stage "adolescents ask who they are and

must establish social and vocational identities; otherwise, they will remain confused about the roles they should play as adults” (Sigelman & Rider, 2006, p.32).

During these stages students are exploring their self-concept as well as evaluating their self-esteem. Self-concept is the perception both positive and negative of your unique attributes and traits. It is how a student evaluates their place in social contexts, the “what I am” portion of their development. For example, a student may be saying, “I am excellent at math and horrible at history or I am good at piano and terrible in any sport” (Sigelman & Rider, 2006, p.287). As children develop their self-concepts become more complex. This typically happens around age eight and is partially due to their cognitive development. It is at this time where they become aware of their social comparison. “Social comparison is using information about how they compare with other individual to characterize and evaluate themselves” (Sigelman & Rider, 2006, p.295). In the United States, social comparison is common because it is a part of our sociocultural context. “Parents, teachers, and others place heavy emphasis on individual achievement” (Sigelman & Rider, 2006, p.295). As students begin to compare themselves individually to others both socially and academically, competition may ensue.

Self-esteem is how you evaluate your self-worth as either high or low based upon your positive and negative self-perceptions. It is the “how good I am” portion of self-perception (Sigelman & Rider, 2006, p.287). When students begin engaging in social comparisons they start to evaluate their own self worth. Harter’s self-perception scale tells us that “by mid-elementary school, children differentiate among five aspects of self worth: social acceptance (being popular or feeling liked); behavioral conduct (staying out of trouble); athletic competence (being good at sports); and physical appearance (feeling good-looking)” (Sigelman & Rider, 2006, p.295).

Students perceptions of themselves, self-concept and self-esteem, can affect both their academic and social environments.

According to a study by Gilbert, McEwan, Bellew, Mills and Gale (2009), “the social arena can be competitive, where the competition is to win a valued place in the hearts and minds of others and individuals are aware that others are making judgments about the self in comparison to others” (p. 124). In schools we can see this with birthday parties, best friends and most recently, with technology and social media pages. Birthday parties, especially in the elementary school age students, are important. If one student is invited and another student is not, competition occurs. If one student was not invited, this can lead the student to feel judged, and in turn it can affect their self-esteem. This is similar to the acquisition of “best friends” in the elementary age students. Every student wants to have friends and be accepted by their peers, which is a normal part of social development. When a student has a “best friend”, students may feel possessive or let down if their best friend chooses to play with someone else, so competition occurs. Social media websites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Vine, more commonly used by teens and adolescents, can also have an impact on students socially. These websites allow issues between friends to be made public, and for information to spread easily, whether it is accurate or not. There is also a competitive desire to have as many friends as one can get on these social media websites, regardless if these students are friends outside of the internet. Thus, social media websites also impact a student’s self-esteem in various ways.

All of the aforementioned concerns can cause issues within the academic environment because the student is focused on the social aspect of school and the academic aspect may be momentarily pushed aside. Students may not be paying attention in class, grades may slip or

students may even avoid school altogether. Today, this is how friendships are often formed and puts in students a desire to be positively recognized by their peers.

We also see competition at school when it comes to sports and other extra-curricular activities such as band. This form of competition can be observed between teammates (fighting for a spot on the team or a starting position), between parents of the teammates, between coaches and referees or among team members and referees. Shields and Bredemeier (2010) stated, “a 14-year-old soccer player punched a 54-year-old volunteer referee after a questionable call in a game” (p. 63). Obviously, this is an example of how competition can be negative. At times, winning becomes so important that students may resort to violent behavior. Their emotions about the situation influence their behavior. In the case above the soccer player’s feelings about the call influenced his behavior, which was punching the referee that made the call. When sports and extra-curricular activities occur through the school, negative effects of competition permeate a school culture, from inside the walls of the school and onto the fields after school is out for the day.

Moral disengagement is one explanation as to why antisocial behavior is being witnessed during sporting events. “Moral disengagement is a collective term for eight psychosocial mechanisms that involve the conditional endorsement of harmful conduct by cognitively distorting the nature of the act, externalizing liability for it, distorting its consequences and/or dehumanizing or blaming its victims” (Stanger, Kavussanu, Boardley & Ring, 2012, p.118). In the situation mentioned above, for example, the soccer player blamed the referee for making a bad call, but he didn’t look at the referee as a person but rather as the bad call itself. In essence, the player is, dehumanizing the referee. This act involves moral reasoning, which is a “cognitive process that an individual goes through in order to reach a moral decision based on her or his

perceptions of morality” (Long, Pantaleon, Bruant & d’Arripe-Longueville, 2006, p.330). Moral reasoning in everyday situations and sports situations differs. According to Long et al (2006) “athletes and non-athletes used higher levels of moral reasoning in everyday situations than in sports situations” (p.331). When looked at in the context of sports, athletes’ had lower moral reasoning levels than non-athletes. Competition in sports can perpetuate the goal of playing and winning. Competition involves a hunt for individual or team advantages over opponents. This then changes an individual’s moral reasoning structures. Their social environment such as the perceptions of teammates and coaches can also influence this change. A positive correlation between teammates expectations with aggression, cheating and rule violations were observed (Long et al, 2006, p.331-332). If members of the team support those expectations than the other teammates will follow suit. This can also be looked at by social comparison. If one student on the team is willing to follow the coaches orders exactly, whether they agree or not, and they receive more playing time, than other teammates are going to want to do the same. This thought process is typical for this type of environment.

This being said, it is imperative that coaches learn and use positive coaching styles for positive results in competition. According to Zourbanos, Hatzigeorgiadis, Tsiakaras, Chroni and Theodorakis (2010), “effective coaches have been described as coaches who must have excellent knowledge of their sport, are innovative strategists, skilled motivators and effective personal counselors. First and foremost, effective coaches must be good teachers” (p.765). The coach will be teaching the students on their team not only the rules and concepts of the sport but will also be demonstrating to them types of behaviors, which can influence the team’s behavior. Their social environment will influence them. The feedback and the behavior that a coach creates can affect the athletes’ development, performance and perceptions. A supportive coaching environment

where the coach demonstrates positive behavior can lead to positive behavior of the team, which could limit moral disengagement and positively influence an athletes' moral reasoning in competition.

In other extra curricular activities, such as band, competition is observed when students compete for a certain spot or chair position in the band. The most coveted spot is that of first chair in whatever particular instrument that is played by the student. Second chair, one seat down from first, is looked at as second best and by some students as a failure. According to Robinson 2008, "Rites of passage such as state band contests, solo and ensemble festivals, or chair challenges are as deeply ingrained in the band culture as the smells of valve oil and slide grease are in the band room's carpeting" (p.203). This sense of competition is both propelled by not only by the band directors, but also the students within the band. "They often go to great lengths to justify and rationalize the value of competition within the ensemble and reserve score for their colleagues who eschew participation in competitive events" (Robinson, 2008, p.203). Failed chair challenges, fighting for your position/seat in the band, often leads to the "loser" quitting band altogether. The trauma of a low score at a state band contest, an audition rejection or the chair challenges can lead to the student feeling a sense of humiliation or shame (Robinson, 2008, p.203). This is an example of some of the negative affects competition can have on students and how it can alter their views on their perceptions of themselves. Further, students who develop skills at slower rates may be discouraged from achieving their true potential in a particular event.

Competition can occur among students in the classroom when looking for teacher approval. Competing for a grade on a homework assignment, attention for a desired behavior, and rewards in the form of praise or a physical object such as a sticker, are all examples of competition among students in the classroom. They are looking for approval from their teachers,

and sometimes that is more important to the students than learning the task they are doing to achieve the approval. Kohn (2001) states that competition we see at school for rewards “creates pressure to keep up the good work” (p. 1). In effort to keep up the “good work” students are in constant competition with their peers in order to achieve the best grade, or most rewards. The students want to be the best at what they are doing and when they are not the best they feel bad because they feel as though they are not doing “good work”.

The Effects of Competition

When students are placed in a contest where they are competing against each other where some win and others lose, even if it’s just a perceived win or loss, students may cope by using cognitive distortions, lies, cheating, stealing and bullying (Shields and Bredemeier, 2010). These are behaviors that educators do not want to encourage in schools. Further, these behaviors can also lead to other issues in schools with students, which will be discussed in the following section.

As presented previously, competition can happen in many places in the school, and it can also cause several different issues in student’s lives. A few of those issues include depression, self-esteem issues, bullying, relational aggression, self-harm, anxiety, stress and feelings of inferiority or worthlessness.

Rising rates of psychopathologies in the U.S. can be linked to increases in competition and competitive behaviors (Gilbert, 2009, p.124). According to Gilbert et al (2009), the World Health Organization reported that depression represents one of the most common mental health issues, and it is a major personal, social and economic problem. Depression is growing along with other mental health issues such as self-harm. Communities that are more competitive than

caring can create an increased awareness of winners and losers as well as promote social comparisons about how one feels about ones self. Gilbert et al suggests, “depressed people feel they are losing the competitions of social life for support, acceptance and care and commonly see this as due to personal undesirable qualities such as being boring, a failure, stupid, incompetent, weak or unattractive” (2009, p.125). When looking at this information in the context of the school competition in the social arena, competition can negatively affect student’s lives. Students are striving to be accepted whether it is by completing homework, a task or making friends and having social supports in the school environment. Depression and self-harm can also be linked with self-esteem in the school setting.

Self-esteem, or in this case lowered self-esteem, is another issue that might be observed in school when working with students who are dealing with competition. Boyall (2013) addressed the idea that a competitive environment can lead to eating disorders. Many of the students who were interviewed in the article stated that when they were in an extremely competitive environment (such as academic expectations in a school) they felt so unhappy and like failures that they developed an unhealthy relationship with food. One student stated, “Pressure came at us from all directions: from the school, from parents and from pupils themselves” (Boyall, 2013, p.1). The students felt that their self-esteem had been lowered because they were always worried if they were competing at or keeping up with the standards that the school, parents and even peers placed on them. One of the ways they thought they could feel better was to be the thinnest. Eating disorders also offered them a sense of control. This research does not suggest that this will happen to every child, adolescent and adult that has ever felt pressure from competition; it simply looks at the correlation between competitive environments and students who have developed an eating disorder because of low self-esteem

(Boyall, 2013, p.1). The issue of eating disorders and self-esteem also relate to the social considerations at school. Eating disorders and social considerations can be linked to competitiveness because the students feel the need to look the best or to fit in with the other students. Competitive behaviors related to body image can involve how they look, how they feel that they look, or how others convey their perceptions of them.

A competitive environment can also cause bullying. When students are pitted against each other in competition, it supports the ideation that there are winners and losers. This can also influence group behavior and not just individual behavior. According to Rhodes and Brickman (2011) “introducing competition between randomly assigned groups leads children to engage in a variety of negative behaviors toward the out-group, including name calling, threats of violence and destruction of property” (p.195). Students act differently when they perceive other students as either winners or losers. The in-group, also known as the winners, treats the out-group, the losers, negatively.

Bullying is another way self-esteem, as discussed previously, can be influenced by competition. Relational issues are tied to the social arena or atmosphere at school and affected by competition. Students want to fit in and form social supports and friendships at school. In the school setting, competition can effect how friendships are formed or not formed, which leads to lowered self-esteem and less social support for the student at school. When a student is bullied at school, which may lower their self-esteem, it might become harder for them to make friends in the social arena. Students with lowered self-esteem because of bullying may withdraw from social activities, extracurricular activities and academic activities. If they withdraw from these activities it becomes difficult for them to make friends because they are not around their peers.

Competition in schools can lead to a variety of negative behaviors. Depression, self-harm, self-esteem issues, and bullying can all be linked to a competitive environment in school and how that environment affects the students, their behavior, emotions and thinking. However, when competition is carefully paired with behavior modification interventions, positive behavior can be the result.

Competition and Behavior Modification

Behavior modification is one method with strong research support that school counselors and other educators can use to involve positive forms of competition in a school setting. In order to use behavior modification effectively it is important to understand what behaviors are. According to Martin and Pear (2003), “behavior is any muscular, glandular, or electrical activity of an organism” (p.3). There are two types of behaviors, overt and covert. Overt behaviors are those that are observable by others. Covert behaviors are private or internal; examples of these are thinking and feeling behaviors (Martin & Pear, 2003, p.3). Examination of overt behavior can help educators determine if the effects of the behavior are positive or negative. If the behavior needs to be changed, educators use behavior modification as a technique to change the behavior. Behavior modification also involves identifying the behavior that is to be modified as well as if there is a behavioral deficit or a behavioral excess of that particular behavior. One method of modifying behavior is through using competition, which can be used negatively or positively. Competition can involve people competing against each other for something such as winning a football game or class valedictorian; in this form, there is always going to be a winner and a loser. However, competition can also be collaborative. Collaborative competition would involve everyone competing together as a group to achieve something where everyone is a winner and there are no losers. An example of this might be if a class is able to all walk down to snack

together in a single file quiet line for an entire week than on Friday they will have ice cream for snack. The class has to work together to achieve this goal, they are not competing against each other but rather with each other collaboratively.

One of the most important characteristics of behavioral modification is “its strong emphasis on defining problems in terms of behavior that can be measured in some way, and using changes in the behavioral measure of the problem as the best indicator of the extent to which the problem is being helped” (Martin & Pear, 2003, p.6). Another important feature is that the treatment procedures and techniques are ways of altering an individual’s environment in order to help the individual function more fully in society. When applied to competition this would mean altering the competitive environment in a way that it is motivating to the student in order to help the student be successful instead of the competitive environment potentially causing behaviors that harm the student such as anxiety or stress. When looking at environment in a student’s life this term encompasses the people, objects and events that are present in their immediate surroundings that can affect their behavior. These people, objects and events are also often referred to as stimuli or the stimulus (Martin & Pear, 2003, p.6). One of the main tenets of behavior modification is the emphasis on the environmental piece of the behavior. The behavior does not happen randomly; it is displayed in the setting of multiple interacting variables such as: environmental, individual, motivational, instructional and biological (Simo-Pinatella, Font-Roura, Planella-Morato, McGill, Almoar-Kurz and Gine, 2013, p.4). Behavior modification techniques can also be applied to a student’s everyday life, so it is possible for parents, teachers, coaches and others to use behavior modification to help students in this way after adult helping professionals are appropriately trained (Martin & Pear, 2003, p.7).

In behavior modification, it is essential to reinforce the behavior that is desired. Positive reinforcement is an effective tool in reinforcing a behavior. A positive reinforcement is something that is offered immediately following a behavior that leads to an increase in that behavior. An example of a positive reinforcer is a reward. Positive reinforcement is specific to the student who receives it. Positive reinforcers do not have the same significance for each student (Ali, Iqbal, Shahzad, Qadeer & Khan, 2011, p.960). According to Downing, Keating and Bennet (2005), "Reinforcement can both shape the teaching of a new skill and encourage its use while punishment is usually ineffective as a teaching tool" (p.1). Reinforcing events can teach a student to make encouraging statements to peers, put more effort into cooperative or competitive play or to stay focused when working on an activity that is not their favorite. Punishing events will not teach these positive behaviors to the student, rather it will only teach the student what behaviors they should avoid. Positive reinforcement is proactive. That is, "reinforcement may also precipitate appropriate behavior when the teacher is not present. This occurs because the new behavior eventually takes on its own innate reinforcing qualities, eliminating the need for external reinforcement" (Downing, Keating & Bennet, 2005, p.1). Students might find that helping and motivating their classmates generates trust, understanding and friendship, which can be self-reinforcing. Self-reinforcing behaviors also relates to intrinsic motivation. "Intrinsic motivation refers to engagement motivated by pleasure or enjoyment" (Henderlong & Lepper, 2002, p.775). When students continue helping and motivating their other classmates without reinforcement from the teacher the student is intrinsically motivated by the emotion it gives them to help others and not because they will be rewarded.

There are three modes of reinforcement, social, activity and tangible. Social reinforcement occurs in any interaction between two or more people. When a teacher gives

attention to a student this is form of social reinforcement. The attention can be verbal or situational such sitting down with a group or student where the students are displaying appropriate behavior. Activity reinforcement occurs when students are allowed to participate in activities as a reward for good behavior. This could include a game or helping out with things in the classroom that they enjoy such as taking attendance. Tangible reinforcement includes a physical object that is given to a student as a reward for good behavior, which might include pencils, erasers and candy. “Teachers should use tangible reinforcement judiciously, and reserve its use for students who are not motivated by social and/or activity reinforcement” (Downing, Keating & Bennet, 2005, p.1). Tangible reinforcement should be paired with social reinforcement. When tangible reinforcement is paired with social reinforcement eventually the tangible reinforcement can be phased out and social reinforcement such as praise will be sufficient.

Positive reinforcement can be used as a tool for motivation. “Motivation is an internal state or condition that activates behavior and gives it direction; desire or want that energizes and directs goal-oriented behavior and influence of needs and desires on the intensity and direction of behavior” (Ali et al, 2011, p.960). There are two types of motivation, intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation occurs when enjoyment in the task itself or an interest drives an individual. This type of motivation exists within the individual. Extrinsic motivation comes from the outside of an individual and drives the individual. Extrinsic motivators can include money or prizes (Ali et al, 2011, p.960). Social reinforcement (verbal) has been linked with intrinsic motivation whereas tangible reinforcement has been linked with extrinsic motivation. “The potential power of praise is evident in the behavior modification literature, in which programs are developed that involve the systematic and contingent use of praise over time for the purpose of reducing

classroom behavior problems and encouraging students to learn” (Henderlong & Lepper, 2002, p.776). Positive effects of praise can lead to self-efficacy with students. Self-efficacy refers to a person’s own belief about their ability to achieve a goal or a specific outcome. Self-efficacy is strongest when it develops from a person’s own accomplishments. However, praise or social reinforcement can be used to instill the belief in others that they have the ability to succeed. This enhances their self-perceptions of efficacy (Henderlong & Lepper, 2002, p.776).

Sigler and Aamidor (2005) state that there is a distinct difference between praise and a positive reinforcement (p.249). The purpose of positive reinforcement is to increase a desired behavior by helping the student identify the behavior and then validate the behavior for the student. Positive reinforcement is a way of pinpointing what behaviors are appropriate and what is not, and then encouraging the appropriate behavior. The behavior also needs to be followed by a pleasurable stimulus; although praise is a type of positive reinforcement, it is not the only one. Positive reinforcement works when an appropriate behavior is attended to and an inappropriate behavior is ignored. If any attention is given during the process of an inappropriate behavior, it is still being reinforced and will most likely cause that behavior (even an inappropriate one) to increase. “Positive attention does not make a child behave inappropriately. Inappropriate behavior is reinforced by adults’ words, actions and attention” (Sigler & Aamidor, 2005, p.249-251).

There are four components to positive reinforcement. 1) The reinforcement must serve to increase a desired behavior. Adults understand that for every inappropriate behavior there is an appropriate one, where as children might not be able to see the other side. It is important that when a child is told that a behavior is inappropriate that they are also told what behavior is appropriate so that they understand the alternative. 2) During this phase of positive

reinforcement, there can also be extinction bursts. “This is the rapid production of the behavior once the reinforcement is taken away” (Sigler & Aamidor, 2005, p.252-252). When an adult ignores the inappropriate behavior, the child often responds with a more intense or excessive amount of the behavior. Then the adult often gives up or believes that ignoring the behavior did not work, which is not an accurate assessment of the behavior. 3) Quick and easily available positive reinforcers such as stickers, praise or a small reward like a pencil are important as well. Tangible rewards, stickers and candy, are not always easily available or desired by the student. Positive attention is often the easiest form of reinforcement. Positive attention may be as simple as sitting down and joining a group that is demonstrating appropriate behavior or as easy as verbally praising a student or group. 4) Ignoring inappropriate behaviors, although challenging at times is important. However, it is crucial to stop dangerous or harmful behaviors immediately. If a child is hitting, pushing, biting, or kicking another child, the educator must stop the behavior immediately, but abstain from a long lecture because then the behavior is unintentionally being reinforced (Sigler & Aamidor, 2005, p. 251-252).

A behavior modification component such as positive reinforcement not only reinforces appropriate acceptable behavior of students, but it can also motivate them. When student behavior is reinforced with social reinforcers, activity reinforcers and limited tangible reinforcers, positive reinforcement can motivate the student as well as other students that witness the behavior. Social reinforcers are praise and positive attention, activity reinforcers may be getting to play a game or an extra recess at the end of the day and tangible reinforcers might be stickers on a behavior chart, pencils and other small prizes. When the students continue to motivate and help each other without being reinforced (social, activity or tangible), then they are

being motivated intrinsically. This leads to the students essentially motivating and helping each other; thus, creating a positive environment within the school.

Discussion

The school counselor can effectively help all of the students in the school, whether they are encountering problematic issues with competition or competition that motivates them. Although there are numerous ways behavior modification can be used with competition, this paper will discuss three which include, a psychoeducational training for the schools stakeholders, a school-wide initiative that includes a guidance lesson and a group counseling program for students who are experiencing issues due to competition.

School counselors have a responsibility not only to the students of the school but also to the stakeholders such as teachers, parents, coaches, staff, administration and community members. An effective way to include those stakeholders would be for the counselor to hold a psychoeducational training session on competition and behavior modification. This would allow all of those stakeholders an opportunity to participate and learn about how competition could affect students at school and methods to address it. In the training session the counselor would discuss where competition at the school happens such as the social arena, sports and extracurricular activities and in the classroom. They would ask the members in the training session if they see competition happening and where they see it. This would lead to discussion on what competition can cause such as self-esteem issues, anxiety, bullying, motivation etc. and how behavioral modification can work with competition in the school. The counselor would discuss the need to first identify the behavior that needs to be changed and the importance of helping the student recognize what a more appropriate behavior would be. For example, it is not

effective to just say, “you need to be a good sport ” if a student is demonstrating unsportsmanlike behavior but perhaps demonstrating or talking about what a good sport is such as giving a teammate a high five or saying encouraging words like “keep going, you can do it, you’ll get it next time”.

Once an appropriate behavior is established the next step is to reinforce that behavior when it occurs. There are many different ways school counselors can use behavioral modification to positively reinforce students in the school setting. As consultant, the school counselor can present reinforcement techniques to teachers, parents, coaches and staff. If teachers, parents, coaches and staff are taught to recognize inappropriate behaviors, replace them with appropriate behaviors, and then to respond to the appropriate behaviors using positive reinforcement, the behavior can be modified.

Specifically, the school counselor would explain what positive reinforcement is and how effective it can be. Types of positive reinforcement such as social, activity and tangible would be described by the counselor and then discussed among the participants at the training. Participants would also be encouraged to discuss how they have or how they would use positive reinforcement with situations they encounter in their everyday lives. They would also be encouraged to discuss how they could use it with the students either at school, at home or in the community if they saw a student exhibiting either appropriate or inappropriate behavior.

Collaborative or cooperative competition would also be discussed as a way to motivate students. An example of this could be the students in the classroom get to have a pizza party if they all remember to follow the rules of the classroom for one week. Rules of the classroom could be raising their hand, picking up their table spots, helping a friend, being quiet listeners,

etc. The students are not competing against each other for something but rather competing with each other for something, but rather competing with each other for something. During the week, positive reinforcement could be used as well such as the teacher praising a student for being quiet and walking respectfully in the hall. This is setting a good example for other students and they will want to model that same behavior so that they will be praised too.

The goal of this training session would be not only to educate the stakeholders about competition and behavior modification, but also to get them to see the benefits of using competition and behavior modification in an appropriate way to motivate the students. This may trickle down into their every day lives, and in turn, impact the students that they work with in classrooms, at home and in the community.

Schools often have school-wide initiatives focused on positive behavior. This is one area that a school counselor could facilitate or coordinate at the school. This would involve getting administration, staff and teachers onboard with the initiative and implementing the initiative. At the beginning of the school year at a staff meeting or workshop day the school counselor would need to present their idea to the administration, staff and teachers of the school. They would need to explain in detail what the initiative was and what they were hoping to gain from it (more positive behaviors at the school). A description of the potential benefits (for both students and faculty) of the initiative would also be important. The counselor would also be responsible to teach a guidance lesson on what appropriate behavior in school looks like to the students (Appendix A).

School counselors can spearhead positive behavior initiatives that “catch students being good”. Teachers, administrators and staff at the school participate by handing out tickets to the

students when they are caught doing something positive, thus reinforcing that behavior. The students then write their name on the tickets and turn them into their teacher. At the end of the month, a student's name from each classroom is picked from the bucket of tickets and they receive a reward. The reward could be a pencil, having lunch with their teacher, principal, the counselor etc., or picking an activity that they would like to do. The student could pick the reward that they would like and then their whole class would participate in the reward thus eliminating potential negative effects of competition.

Positive behavior initiatives are a good way of incorporating competition in a positive way. Students are not overtly competing with each other (such as tug of war or kickball), but they are competing to display appropriate behavior. Many students might not even realize that they are competing because the focus is not the competition, but displaying appropriate behavior. When another student helps a friend in the lunch line with their tray and then is given a ticket for appropriate behavior the other students in the line witness that act. This could motivate them to do something helpful for another classmate. Students might not always be caught displaying appropriate positive behaviors but the initiative encourages and motivates them to keep trying in case they are spotted so that they can be rewarded for their positive acts.

School counselors are also in the unique position to hold small groups during the school day. This is another way that school counselors can support students who might be experiencing negative effects of competition in school, yet allowing them a venue where the school counselor can incorporate behavior modification techniques. There are several different groups that could arise due to competition such as self-esteem groups, anger management groups, friendship groups, and so on. All of these groups would need careful consideration by the counselor as to who would be appropriate members for the group, how many students in each group, when will

they meet and what will be done within the group. For example, a small counseling group could be created when there are four, third graders that get really angry when they do not win. An example of one lesson used in this small group can be found in Appendix B.

That is only one example of a group that could be created due to competition but there are many different groups that could be formed. It is important for the school counselor to be able to identify the current needs of the students in the school and then to be able to organize and plan services accordingly. Groups are only one way that can be done, some students might not want to be involved in a group, or may not be appropriate for group work. In cases such as these, then perhaps individual counseling would be the best option. The individual counseling session could be a place where the students practice their replacement behavior, and then are asked to generalize it to the classroom. Either the classroom teacher or the school counselor can be responsible for reinforcing the student's positive behavior. Regardless who reinforces the student's behavior it is important that it is consistent over time until the replacement behavior is adopted. An example of an individual counseling treatment plan is provided in Appendix C. The counselor needs to be able to provide the most appropriate and effective services to each and every student through a range of interventions including consultation with teachers, group work and individual counseling with a few students, or through the guidance curriculum with an entire grade of students.

Conclusion

Competition is something that can be observed everyday in the K-12 school setting. It can occur in both the social arena and the academic arena in school. Students compete in the social arena in terms of creating and maintaining friendships. The academic arena can be

observed when students are competing grades with each other. The academic and social arena can also become intertwined because they can affect each other. When students compare themselves individually to others socially and academically, competition occurs. If the environment is overly competitive issues with the students such as cognitive distortions, self-esteem, self-harm, depression, anxiety, stress and bullying can occur.

Competition affects every student differently it can cause some student anxiety and stress and for other students it motivates them to achieve more. Schools counselors have a responsibility to help every student achieve their full potential (ASCA, 2004). Students in a school setting may thrive from competition and some students might suffer from competition. The school counselor needs to recognize the needs of each and every student and respond accordingly. It is up to the school counselor to recognize the needs of the students in the school and then to tailor the comprehensive school-counseling program to fit the needs of those students. School counselors address the needs of the students through guidance lessons, individual counseling and group work. Each and every student in the school is different and therefore will have different needs; some students might benefit the most from guidance lessons, some from group counseling and others from individual counseling. The counselor is responsible for recognizing the needs of each student and the appropriate type of counseling for the student.

Competition can also be used as a powerful tool to motivate students in the K-12 school setting but staff, teachers, administrators and school counselors must use it appropriately. It can be used in conjunction with behavior modification to reinforce positive appropriate behavior in the school setting. The school counselor can be an important resource and consultant for teaching school personnel how to use competition appropriately to motivate students. Using competition to motivate students may inspire them to display appropriate behavior, which also creates a safer

school environment for every student. When school counselors' work together with staff, administrators, teachers and community members to create a safe and welcoming environment students are provided with the opportunity to be successful in school.

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Appendix A

Lesson Plan/ Responsibility**Class:** K-1**Unit:** Social Skills/Responsibility**Teachers:** Andrea Heinrich

Objectives: 1. The students will demonstrate knowledge on what responsibility is. 2. The students will be able to identify what it looks like to be responsible at school. 3. The students will be able to identify what good choices and not so good choices look like at school and how they can change their choices. 4.) The students will be able to look how making good choices at school helps them to be successful.

Standards: ASCA National Standards for Students

Academic Development Standard A: Students will acquire the attitudes, knowledge and skills that contribute to effective learning in school and across the life span.

A:A1.5 Identify attitudes and behaviors that lead to successful learning

A:A3.1 Take responsibility for their actions

Personal/Social Standard A: Students will acquire the knowledge, attitudes and interpersonal skills to help them understand and respect self and others.

PS: A1.5 Identify and express feelings

PS: A1.6 Distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate behavior

PS:A1.8 Understand the need for self-control and how to practice it

PS:A2.1 Recognize that everyone has rights and responsibilities

PS:A2.2 Respect alternative points of view

PS: A2.6 Use effective communications skills

Anticipatory Set:

Start in the class by introducing the topics by saying; “ Today we are going to talk about responsibility and the choices we make. “Can any of you raise your hand and tell me what you think responsibility is?” The students will then be given a chance to tell their ideas about responsibility. Next the students will be asked, “ If I was a fly on the wall in your classroom what would I see that would let me know a student was being responsible?”. The students will be given a chance to tell their ideas about what responsible students look like.

Input: Responsibility means that we take care of ourselves, our belongings and that we are following the rules that we have at school. We also need to take responsibility for our own actions and not blaming others. Everyone makes mistakes sometimes, that's ok we just need to admit we made them and than change what we would do next time. We all have the ability to make our own choices. Sometimes our choices are good choices and sometimes we could all make better choices.

Modeling: School Counselor will model with a short scenario what it looks like to a good choice at school might look like, such as walking down the hall quietly in a line with hands at your side. A “not so good” choice will also discussed such as running down the hall or talking to a friend when walking down the hall.

Check for Understanding: After the school counselor models and discusses one good choice and one not so good choice they will ask the class to help them make a list of good choices and “not so good” choices. The “not so good” choices will be discussed further such as “what could we do differently”.

Guided Practice: The school counselor will then present the class with a paper cutout key and say, “What do keys do?” The students will be given a chance to answer. The counselor will then explain that these keys, “the good choice keys”, can help them to get started as good students and help them to open the door to success. Each student will then be given a key and asked to draw a “good choice” that they think they can practice at school. Students will have a chance to share some of their responses with the class. The keys will be displayed in their classroom to remind them that they all have a responsibility and the ability to make good choices.

Materials:

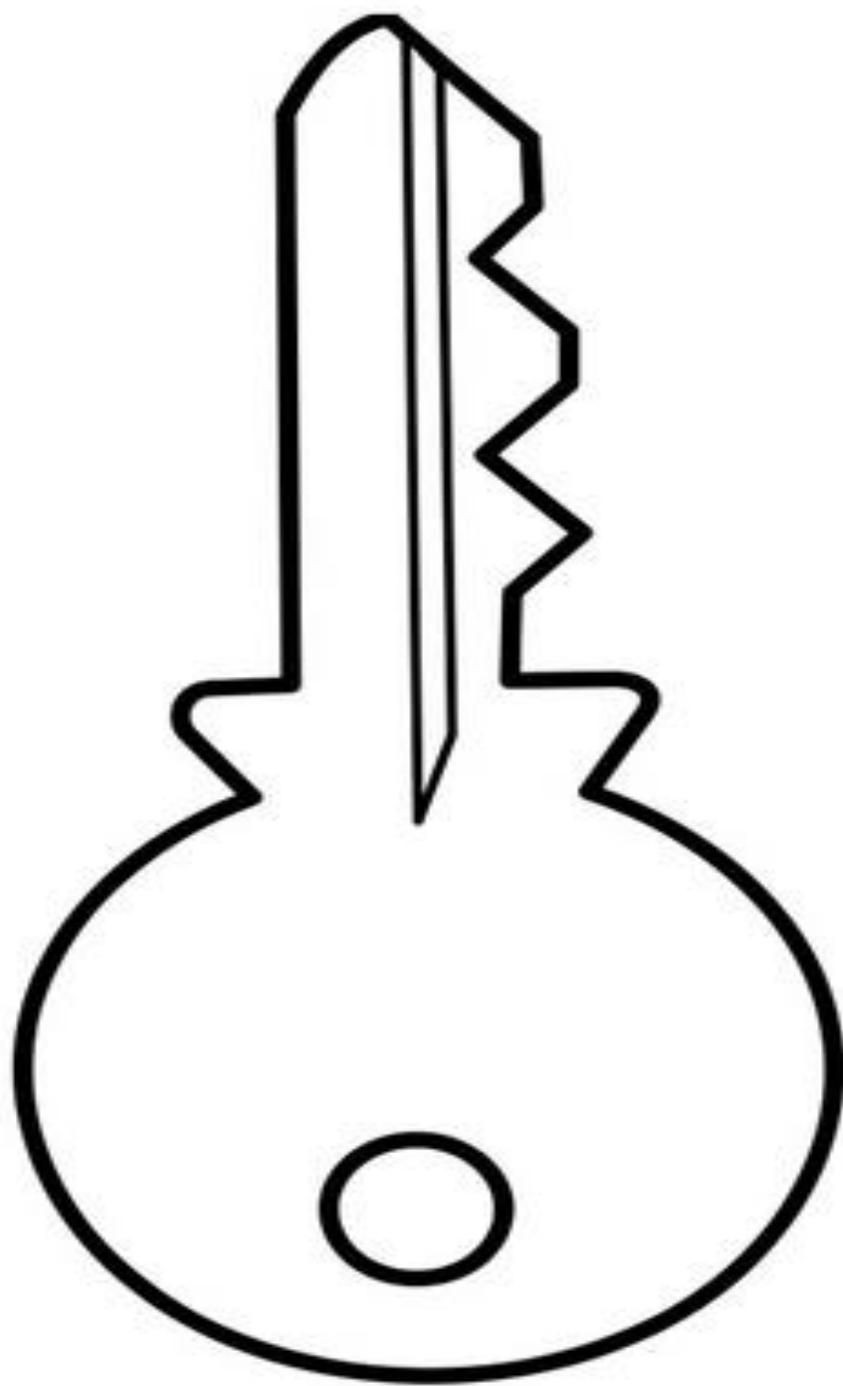
- Cutout Keys
- Smart board for list of choices
- Crayons/colored pencils/markers

Resources:

Wittmer, J., Thompson, D. W., & Loesch, L. C. (1997). *Classroom guidance activities: a sourcebook for elementary counselors : personal and social development, academic development, career development.*

Minneapolis, MN: Educational Media Corp.

Griffith, K. (2008). *Creative Small Groups.* Warminster: Mar*co Products Inc.



Appendix B

Small Group with “Angries”

Materials:

- Giant sheet of paper
- Feelings chart
- Scissors
- Glue
- Markers
- Fluffy-puffy craft balls
- Pipe cleaners
- Googly eyes
- Chart paper and marker or chalkboard and chalk

Activity:

- ◆ Explain to the group that today we are going to talk about anger. Let the students take turns describing what anger means to them. If they need help identifying anger help them with a feelings chart. (With younger students a book on anger may be appropriate)
- ◆ When anger is defined have the students begin brainstorming situations that trigger anger for them. While they are brainstorming ideas record them on the chart paper or chalkboard.
- ◆ Once anger triggers have been determined have one of the students lay down on the giant sheet of paper and have another student trace their outline with a marker onto the paper. Help them then to identify where they feel anger throughout their body. Using the trigger situations they talked about can help in creating a storyline they can work from.
- ◆ Explain that next that everyone’s “angries” are different (some have lots of eyes, some are puffy, some are long as skinny) and that we are all going to get a chance to make our “angries”. Have them make as many as the feel they need to make or as many as they feel inside. When finished let them place their “angries” on the body outline.
- ◆ Tell the students about coping skills that can help calm their “angries” such as deep breathing, counting backwards from ten, thinking “cool” thoughts and walking away. Practice these techniques with the students. Also ask them if they have anything that they have tried before to calm their “angries”.
- ◆ Process with the students how their “angries” can build up and start to grumble inside like a volcano and how their calming skills can help to stop the angries from erupting.

Resources:

Behavioral Interventions--For Kids!. (2012, July 24). : *Angries!*. Retrieved April 4,

2014, from <http://www.psideaweb.com/2012/07/angries.html>

Appendix C

Best Self- Session 2**Materials:**

- **Polaroid Camera (optional)**
- **Wanted Poster**
- **Crayons or markers**

Activity:

- ◆ Start the session by saying that last week we talked about appropriate and inappropriate choices within the classroom. Review some of the choices, both appropriate and inappropriate, that were discussed.
- ◆ Ask the student, what would your best self be like? Give them time to answer what their best self would look like. How would they act and what would they do?
- ◆ Next pose the question of, what do you wish you were like in the classroom? Allow them time to answer. Also ask what appropriate choices do you think your teacher wants you to make? This could also be a chance to reflect on a time when an inappropriate choice was made, the consequences that followed and how that affected the student. It would also be important to explore a more appropriate choice that could have been made.
- ◆ On the wanted poster have the student write positive comments about their ideal selves in relation to the classroom, things that were most important to them. An example of this might be raising hand to be called on instead of blurting out or listening when the teacher is talking instead of talking to another student.
- ◆ If you have a camera take a picture of the student and let them attach the picture to their wanted poster. If a camera isn't available the student can draw a self-portrait on the poster. Let the student take their poster back to class to remind them about appropriate choices.

Resources:

Griffith, K. (2008). *Creative Small Groups*. Warminster: Mar*co Products Inc.

WANTED

My Best Self
