

## Module 2- Activity 4- Module Review

Brenda Reed

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### Part 1

The work completed in module 2 brought to light some positive points to my approach to working with students with aggression. As I read the Brophy text, I found that others were reinforcing my own ideas about how to most effectively work with aggressive or difficult students.

During my career in our alternative education program, I have often been somewhat criticized for my approach to teaching and working with my students. Often my co-workers (and even my director) have inferred that I was “too soft” toward our students, and that I needed to take a harsher stance with them. Along with that, my co-workers have always been “put off” by the fact that our students generally come to me when they want to discuss an issue or are having problems of any kind. The same is true of my peers when former students return to our program simply to visit me, even after many years after graduating from our program. After reading the Brophy text, I now better understand my own position, as well as my colleagues, even better than before.

When dealing with hostile students, Brophy states that “authors typically advise teachers to build good personal relationships with these students, avoid power struggles, and accommodate their needs to a degree by ignoring minor provocations and helping them to learn better ways of handling their feelings, while at the same time being clear in stating limits and consistent in enforcing them.” (Brophy, p. 236) Where my colleagues have viewed my work with our students as “soft” or even “too lenient”, what they have failed to understand is that I have specific reasons for handling my students the way I do. I suppose there are times when I am “soft” toward my students, but it is because I want to build that trust and relationship with them that will enable us both to move forward in order to develop in them a better approach to dealing with the world around them. Brophy explains that Parsons, in 1983, suggested ways to reduce student aggression tactics. Parson states that the teacher should first “work to increase their [the students’] assertiveness and communication skills, so that they can begin to express their feelings more directly.” (Brophy, p. 208) Brophy also shows us that the higher rated teachers in his study, in terms of the vignette discussing “Jack” and “Audrey”, were most concerned with “developing insight and using other strategies to induce larger changes in behavior patterns, not just on exerting control in the immediate situation.” (Brophy, p. 222) While I personally was using these same tactics with my own students, even against the approval of my colleagues around me, I didn’t know that the literature would defend my approach. I was simply doing what seemed natural to me and best for my students.

I have felt for many years that all students need more from schooling than just learning how to read or work math problems. As our world becomes more and more difficult for students to balance home life,

schooling, and societal pressures, teachers need to be willing to help students learn better ways of dealing with their stress. We cannot simply demand that students “behave” if we have not given them the tools to know how to do that. Brophy’s data suggests that “lower rated teachers would be more threatened by passive-aggressive behavior and more likely to respond punitively to it. In contrast, higher rated teachers would be more likely to find it puzzling, seek to find out more about it by talking with the student and getting information from other sources, and address it using a variety of problem-solving strategies in addition to or instead of imposing limits and suppressing misbehavior.” (211) This statements reflects my own thoughts on educators in today’s schools. We need to let go of past conceptions of what students are “supposed to be”, and find appropriate and better ways to deal with “who they are” and help them to develop the tools they need to deal with their presents and futures.

## Part 2

As for strategies and reactions for working with my students, I am left feeling concerned and unsure of a specific path to take in my classroom as no two students, or two days, are ever alike. I understand the need to discuss with students what actions and behaviors I expect from them in my classroom. I also understand having specific goals and guidelines for everyone to follow, but my concern lies in the fact that no situation ever “neatly” fits into a set discipline plan. Brophy, on page 207, gives us strategies for coping with passive-aggressive behavior that include allowing student choice in assignments and work conditions, avoiding direct commands and confrontation, using material or activity rewards rather than praise, and ignore resistance, delay, and attempt at manipulation. I believe these strategies will work well in most situations that I encounter in my own classroom, so I interpret Brophy’s words mean “respect your students, be willing to flex when necessary, and don’t sweat the small stuff.” As shown with so many of the case studies, especially the lower rated teachers, educators need to take blame when necessary and take some responsibility with how we are working with our students. Again, not all students are the same, but at the same time they are all still “kids”. Each student should be considered equal, and our job must be taking the time to get to know our students, providing a style of learning that makes sense, and showing them how to be a successful member of society. If we show and give respect, most students will accept it- each in his own time. And for those who don’t want to accept it, all we can do is keep trying every single day.

## Part 3

My case challenge is that the student I have chosen rarely attends school. Because she is dealing with a mother who has essentially “abandoned” her, a father who lives in a different state, and a live-in boyfriend who is often a poor influence, it is hard for my student to find the motivation to attend classes. My goal is to remind her of her upcoming college courses in the fall-assuming she graduates from our program on time. This student is incredibly bright academically, but her poor home situation has clouded her judgment so much that she is forgetting how important her future is to her. She has discussed her future plans with me, so I want to use that as leverage and motivation to get her back into our program and graduate on time. She will need to do some extra make-up work at this point in order to accomplish her goals, so I will need to be persuasive and consistent, but I am willing to try. Again

though, the hardest part for me to overcome is the fact that I cannot force her to show up each day. All I can do is keep in touch with her and show her the importance of her goal.

In terms of skills I need to develop, I believe time-management will be the key for working with this student. My days are so full of random events and issues that pop up throughout the day that it is difficult to find time to complete tasks when I need to. I need to create a plan that keeps me on schedule so that I am better equipped to continue serving my students who do attend class each day while also working toward getting my “less-motivated” students to attend. I do not expect it to be easy.

### Group Work

I truly enjoy working with the ladies in my group. I believe we have a lot in common when it comes to our daily teaching, and we have many ideas to share with each other about how to better serve our students. This week we have not made as many comments on the discussion boards as the previous weeks, but we keep in contact through text messages, emails, and lengthy Skype talks. We don't have a lot of extra time during the week to meet, but we hold weekly meetings on Saturday mornings and those go very well. At those meetings we discuss all of the information for the assignments, as well as our own jobs and how this class applies to what we do each day. I feel that we do a nice job of working the texts into our conversations and we go away from those discussions with a good understanding of what we are to be learning and doing.

This upcoming week is my week to lead, and I am incredibly worried because I work two nights a week as well as have children at home to care for. My time is limited and I worry about not being able to get the leadership work done as effectively as the other two have. I don't want to let them down in any way. I'm sure it will work out just fine.

On a scale of 1-5, I will give us a 5. We haven't discussed as much this week, but I have not felt lost because of it. I am more than pleased with our group work.