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SPEAKERS

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Welcome to the Autism Classroom Resources Podcast, the podcast for special educators who are looking for personal and professional development. I'm your host Dr. Christine Reeve. For more than 20 years, I've worn lots of hats in special education. But my real love is helping special educators like you. This podcast will give you tips and ways to implement research based practices in a practical way in your classroom, to make your job easier and more effective.

Welcome back to the Autism Classroom Resources Podcast. I'm Dr. Christine Reeve, and I'm your host. You're listening to Episode 213.

We have been doing a series on challenging behavior. And I'm going to turn the tables a little bit today. And I'm going to be talking about not just how we can make a difference in the challenging behavior of our students, but how the behavior of our students and those around us impact our own behavior, and what that means for our students' behavior.

Essentially, I want you to think about the fact that challenging behavior is not a one way street. Any kind of behavior change is not a one way street. It is a circular process. And the people around us impact the behaviors that we all demonstrate. And it certainly is no difference with our students.

Now, this was originally a podcast episode that was part of the Special Educator Academy. And I'm going to tweak it just a bit and redo it here. So some of this may be familiar if you were an Academy member a while back. But I think it's a really important thing to talk about.

This is actually a set of research called Child effects research that shows that teachers' and paraprofessionals' and parents' behavior is impacted by the behavior of the children, the students around them. This is not unique to classrooms. This is not unique to home, it's not unique to children,

it's true of everybody. We are all impacted by the context in which we behave, our behavior changes according to that context.

So I will talk about how that how that behavior changes. And the fact that behavior change doesn't just go one way, it's a reciprocal process. All of us are changing our behaviors all the time for our different situations. So let's get started.

This research literature comes initially out of their literature on parenting. Richard Bell in the 60s and 70s was one of the first researchers to note the influence of behavior was not a one way street. He looked at parents behavior and how it was influenced by their child's behavior, not just how the child's behavior was influenced by the parent.

Now in the area of education Ted Carr, my mentor, and Jill Taylor and Sarah Robinson look specifically at this area in relation to instruction. And what they found was that when a teacher worked with pairs of students, one of whom had a history of challenging behavior that occurred when instructional demands were placed on them, and the other child in the dyad had no problems. They were considered non problem, children, for lack of a better term, they found that the teachers worked with the non-problem child more. And when they worked with the child who had instruction related problems, read: behaviors that served to escape from a situation, they typically gave them tasks that were associated with lower levels of problem behaviors. And they students did not work as long or as hard.

So what we're seeing is that when they were working with a student who had problem behaviors to get out of instruction, escape related behavior, and a student who was ready to work, they were giving more attention and more challenging work to the one who wasn't demonstrating bad behavior, which of course, was then reinforcing the escape related behavior. But it wasn't something they were aware of, and realizing that they were doing, it was something that they looked at their data and saw a difference in that change.

In another study, Jill Taylor and Ted Carr looked at the impact of three different types of profiles of children with developmental disabilities. And they looked at students who had behavior that was attention seeking, students who had behavior that was socially avoidant, meaning they actively engaged in challenging behavior to remove themselves or to avoid situations involving interacting with others, and then a comparison group that didn't show any of those characteristics.

And what they found was that the adult responded to problem behaviors of the attention seeking students by providing more attention, increasing physical contact, and presenting academic demands that required a lot more continuous adult attention. They found that they responded to the social avoidant group by providing less attention, lower levels of physical contact, and giving them tasks that were more independent and required less continuous attention from the adults. And they didn't see those differences in the non-problem children.

So in other words, the students' behavior drove the behavior of the adults without their realizing it, because when you interviewed these adults they didn't recognize that was what was happening.

These types of results have been replicated and are very similar to processes that I used in my dissertation. Reed and Carr found that children with attention seeking minor behaviors, crying, whining, when they were paired with for instruction with a student who had no problems at all, they were more likely to receive attention throughout the session, and the non-problem child received almost no attention. And that the behaviors escalated when the teacher tried to shift that dynamic back recognizing that they were not attending to the other child as much, when the teacher tried to shift them back, their behaviors escalate.

So why is all of this important? Well, it's important for a number of reasons. The first reason is that we really want to be aware of the fact that behavioral has reciprocal impacts within the classroom. It's not just our behavior, changing that of the students. The students' behavior is changing our behavior and many, many times we are not particularly aware of it.

Many times, I will see a student who had a history of challenging behavior, and is in a classroom where they're not having those behaviors. And sometimes that's the result of the fact that they have a teacher or classroom staff that understands them, knows how to help them, and is put things in place to help them be more successful. But sometimes it is the case that what they've done is essentially trained the staff to leave them alone, to give them easier things, because their behavior has acted up so many times they have that history.

So it's one thing to have a behavior support plan that lessens demands, while we're teaching a student with escape related behaviors to ask for a break. But to have demands that just naturally start to fade out without a plan in place, and without people even realizing that it's happening, obviously, is going to be really detrimental to that student's education. So we really want to be vigilant for this and recognize that it happens.

It's also important because we can stop this cycle if we are aware of it. But if we know about it, then we're not looking for it. Sometimes it really takes somebody coming in from the outside to take a look at it because it's really hard to see what your own behavior is doing. It's also important because it's happening to everybody in the classroom.

So chances are that you are observing this in other adults in your classroom. I see it very frequently with teachers who are seeing this type of change in adult behavior with the staff in the classroom. I've also seen it with paras who see it from a teacher. It's much easier to observe with other adults than it is for yourself. So it's really important that we keep this in mind, that we kind of put it in perspective. In addition to dealing with challenging behavior.

It's also important because we want to build a team that watches each other's back, to try to make this not as big a deal. This is an area where we can really work together and talk about this behavioral phenomenon, there is no blame to be had your behavior changing is a natural phenomenon. It is not something people are doing on purpose.

Awareness makes it possible for people to try to avoid it. But also because it's a lot easier for us to see it in each other and warn each other about it, we can create a safe environment for us to talk about it and call to people's attention. So this is an opportunity for reciprocal interaction with the team to watch out for your behavior if you're showing this as the teacher, or if you're seeing it in others. And this is one of that I highly recommend that we are working together as a team so that the paras are giving the teacher feedback on their behavior as well. This is not a one way street. We all have to watch each other's back. That's how we work together as a collaborative team.

It's also really important because it's not just our children's behavior that's impacting our behavior. Coworkers behavior impacts our behavior and our behavior impacts theirs. Reciprocal behavior change is all around us. You've seen it on teams where para pros behavior is impacted by their colleagues when team members looking at their phone regularly. And after a while you see it everywhere. This is one of the reasons why that timely feedback is really important when you're dealing with situations so they don't escalate and start to change other people's behavior, so you don't have that snowball effect. Because not only will it address that presenting issue, but it can keep it from snowballing.

In the case of the phone, it might be something as simple as a written reminder To everybody in the staff to not be on their phone, reminding them to call you on it if you're doing it because let's face it, it's really hard to ignore the phone when it vibrates, or it makes it sound. We are trained to pick it up.

We are trained, you know, there was a time when looking at your watch meant, I'm running late. And really now what that means is, oh, I have a message, I have a text. It's really hard not to look at it. So it's important to remember that it may not just be the paraprofessionals whose behavior you're seeing this, and they may be seeing it in yours, and they need to have permission, this needs to be a permission where everybody can share it with everybody. It's important to recognize that as a teacher, your behavior impacts them as well.

Those are some ideas for how we can use this information. I will be back in the next few weeks to talk about teaching small group and how this has an impact on that and what we want to think about it. So I'll get a little bit more specific.

But next week, I'm very excited because you're going to have the opportunity to hear from a parent who is going to share with you her perspective of working with schools and I'm really excited for what she is going to share. So I hope that you will join us next week.

Until then, if you're enjoying the podcast, please go to Apple podcasts and leave a review. I would love for you to share your thoughts and what you're looking for. You can also find me on TikTok at [tiktok.com/autismclassroomresources](https://www.tiktok.com/autismclassroomresources), and you can definitely share your thoughts of what you'd like to hear more about there as well. So until next week, I'll talk to you later.

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