

# REBT: A MENTAL HEALTH CURRICULUM IN THE CLASSROOM

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# Introduction

- Cognitive behavior interventions (CBIs) & how affective mental health approach has been used with children and adolescents in various educational settings
- Discussion includes strategies that inform classroom implementation of this traditionally clinically approach.

# Cognitive Behavior Interventions

Etscheidt, 1991; Squires, 2001

- ◎ CBIs result in behavior change by teaching relevant tasks that are based around strategies to correct cognitive distortions through the application of logic and the search for evidence.
  - Goals are clearly specified;
  - Decisions are made on how to best meet specified goal and how to measure progress toward goals to provide feedback.
  - The intervention task-oriented; focused on problem solving.
- ◎ The underlying premise of CBI is that **thinking precedes feelings and feelings precede behavior**. Therefore, if cognitions change then feelings and behaviors will change.

# Cognitive Behavior Interventions

(Morris, 1993)

- Cognitive-behavioral interventions encompass a variety of strategies
- Have been utilized across diverse populations
- More difficulty in ascertaining the effectiveness of CBIs
- The efficacy of treatment programs is directly related to the specific characteristics, traits, and attributes associated with each group

# Cognitive Behavior Interventions

(Ager & Cole, 1991; Etscheidt, 1991; Kazdin, 1987; Kazdin, 1991; Kendall, Reber, McLeer, Epps, & Ronan; 1990).

- ◎ Components of CBI training include but not limited to...
  - self-instruction,
  - self-control,
  - role-play,
  - modeling,
  - coaching,
  - problem-solving
  - response-cost procedures
  - Relaxation techniques

# What is REBT?

Ellis, 2001; 1991

- ⦿ A unique philosophy of life and an effective intervention for reducing intense emotional feelings and behaviors.
- ⦿ Originally designed to be a clinical technique.
- ⦿ Developed into a practical classroom tool for the prevention and remediation of emotional and behavioral disturbances (EBD).
- ⦿ Recognizes the influence that cognitions have on behavior and emotions.
- ⦿ Suggests that all three must be regarded in order to modify disturbances.

# Purpose of REBT

DiGiuseppe, 1998

- To help students learn to deal with serious emotional problems that may negatively impact a person's ability to reach their goals
- To combat extremely negative feelings and behaviors
- To provide a model that shows how individuals can manage their problems

# Affective Curriculum

- From a REBT perspective, valuable affective programming should increase thinking that promotes goal attainment and thereby reducing emotional disturbance.
- Educational REBT programs have been taught to groups of children as young as 8 who learned to accept responsibility for their emotions and to use cognitive, behavioral, and affective techniques in order to reduce self-defeating attitudes, feelings and behaviors.



# Review of the Literature

Barnes, 2000; Banks, 2006; Morris, 1993; Patton, 1995; Rudish & Millice, 1997; Sapp, 1996; 1994; Shannon & Allen, 1998

- ◎ Traditional classroom environments to non-traditional educational settings with special populations such as...
  - Pullout and resource classroom settings
  - After school programs
  - Upward Bound programs
  - School programs housed in a psychiatric hospital and day treatment settings
  - A number of studies have supported Ellis's theory that cognitions can modify behavior and are related to emotional disturbance

# Educational Applications

(DiGiuseppe & Bernard, 1990)

- ◎ Classroom therapeutic intervention or problem – solving intervention
  - Found to be effective in helping students work on their emotional and behavioral disturbances, by using...
    - Teacher – student counseling
    - Teacher – group counseling
    - Structured classroom lessons
  - Attempts to teach students to help themselves by utilizing a structured process
  - Active teacher – student collaboration

# Educational Applications

Zionts & Zionts, 1997

- ⦿ Affective programming needs to be integrated as part of classroom curriculum.
- ⦿ Previous research suggested that teachers should teach the basic principles of REBT including distinguishing fact from opinion, identifying and understanding feelings and recognizing and identifying irrational thinking patterns.
- ⦿ Suggested sequence for teachers who would like to integrate the affective program: REBT principles → problem solving → ABC model

# Educational Applications

- Wilde (1996) proposed that elementary students could learn rational thinking skills in a short-term developmental guidance program.
- Lesson 1 was designed to establish the link between thoughts and feelings.
- Lesson 2 students were taught how to distinguish between rational and irrational beliefs.
- Lesson 3 served as a review of skills learned in from the previous lessons.
- Lesson 4 students actively engaged in the learning of ABC model “Let’s Get Rational.”

# Educational Applications

- Morris (1993) investigated the effects of a 12-week affective program, based on REBT.
- The first 2 weeks focused on assessment, relationship building and personal issues relevant to the participants.
- Learning to deal with self-defeating thoughts that lead to emotional disturbance was the focal point for the following 8 weeks.
- Students learned to identify concepts related to irrational beliefs, automatic thoughts, and emotional responses reflective of thoughts and beliefs.

# Educational Applications

- ⦿ Banks (2006) conducted a study to determine if students with ED could understand the content of REBT
  - Phase I: Cognitive Preparation
  - Phase II: Instruction
  - Phase III: Application
- ⦿ Suggested that it is imperative that professionals consider the characteristics of students with ED in educational settings.
- ⦿ Lesson plans and overview of literature on REBT will be provided.

# Educational Applications

- REBT lessons should be goal oriented and contain objectives relating to the core REBT concepts.
- Each lesson should include an activity designed to spark the interest of the students and involve the student in the concept being introduced.
- Students can participate in role plays, games, reading, writing or art activities, feeling games, group assignments, or dramatizations.
- Vernon (1990; 2006a, 2006b) suggested that 15-25 minutes be reserved for activating the interest of students.
- The discussion component is essential.

# Educational Applications

- Knaus (2001) discussed integrating REBT into the general curriculum
- To build positive mental health concepts and problem solving activities that can be understood by teachers and students.
- Concepts should be introduced in a systematic fashion and gain experience from using skills learned.
- Knaus (2001) integrated discussions, stimulating activities and took advantage of teachable moments to maintain student motivation throughout the teaching sequence.
- Major contention was that REBT lessons do not have to be a separate curriculum and can be integrated into the general classroom curriculum.



# BASIC THEORETICAL ASSUMPTIONS

1. PEOPLE ARE UNIQUELY RATIONAL...CLEAR THINKERS
2. RATIONAL DOES NOT EQUAL LOGICAL
3. THEREFORE, PEOPLE ARE UNIQUELY IRRATIONAL..UNCLEAR THINKERS
4. THINKING CAUSES FEELINGS

# The ABCs of REBT

A is the *Activating Event*

C is the *Consequences*

B is the *Belief System*

$$A + B = C$$

- ⦿ A” cannot be changed...although the B and C can be changed.
- ⦿ Appropriate and Inappropriate Feelings
- ⦿ Rational and Irrational Thinking

# 3 Belief Systems

- *Demanding*

- *Awfulizing and Catastrophizing*

- *Rating*

# CBIs in the Classroom

- ⦿ Previous studies have **demonstrated CBIs to be effective in helping students work on their emotional and behavioral problems through use of teacher-student or teacher-group structured group or classroom lessons** (DiGiuseppe, 1990).
- ⦿ Research studies have demonstrated the efficacy of REBT with school-aged children in treating a number of psychological and behavioral problems including: conduct disorders (DiGiuseppe, 1988), low frustration tolerance (Knaus, 1983), impulsivity (Kendell & Fischler, 1983), obesity (Foreyt, 1987), and increasing self-esteem and self-concept (Omizo, 1986).
- ⦿ REBT has received **professional acceptance from teachers as well as school psychologists**, as evidenced in the section on REBT for school psychologists in *The Handbook of School Psychology* (Reynolds & Gutkin, 1982).

# Conclusion

- Affective mental health curriculum in the classroom attempts to cause change in internal structures to assist with the management of behavior.
- The goal being to decrease intense extreme emotions when facing a problematic situation.
- To increase the probability of classroom goal attainment.

# Conclusion

- ⦿ Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy is traditionally a clinical CBT approach that has been applied in educational settings with children and adolescents.
- ⦿ Educational derivatives of REBT have been in various settings using a myriad of behavioral and emotional problems.
- ⦿ The effectiveness of this comprehensive, short-term intervention supplies educational professionals with an affective curriculum that is efficient and cost effective.

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