



The WCPA News

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Locus of Control

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In every profession, there are concepts we learn about in school but, at the time, they have no practical meaning in our professional lives. In many cases, these concepts are forgotten. Sometimes, however, we stumble across one of these forgotten gems and see it in a new light. We see it in such a way that it has greater meaning and it ties all the loose ends together. This happened recently at WCPA. The forgotten gem was something called "Locus of Control."

Locus of Control refers to the personality construct that defines how an individual perceives the origins of motivation and the consequences of events (i.e. internally or externally). An internal Locus of Control can be defined as the belief that one is the author of his or her own fate. It is learned from freely making choices and taking responsibility for those choices. For example, does a child believe that an "A" on a test is the product of hard work and study (internal Locus of Control) or the result of luck and happenstance (external Locus of Control)? Or, do children succeed because of rewards, such as winning the gold medal, (external Locus of Control) or because of the innate sense of achievement that we experience when we do our best (internal Locus of Control)?

This is a critical issue for society, as a whole, and for our children, in particular. We have become a society in which we attempt to motivate children on an external basis. Examples of this include the teenager who is promised a new car if he receives all A's on his next report card or the child who is paid for doing regular household chores. We have lost sight of the fact that the student works for an A grade because that is the best he can do and it makes him feel productive and successful. This is an internal reward. The child who regularly cleans her room and does the dinner dishes is being a productive member of that family. Her sense of contributing to the family and experiencing what it feels like to have a clean and neat bedroom and a tidied kitchen is an internal reward. When we reward children only on an external basis they quickly learn that they perform for an external reward, not because of the job well done.

In helping children learn how to internalize their Locus of Control, it is necessary that they be allowed to experience the consequences of their choices, whether positive or negative. It has been our perception at WCPA that today's parents are much more likely to try to insulate their children from the negative consequences of their behaviors. When children are not permitted to fail or experience negative consequences, they do not learn the skills necessary to "right the ship." Because these children do not have to work for the things they receive, they never develop the ability to perceive of goals and consequences as being self-generated (i.e. coming from inside them). When the Locus of Control remains external, the individual is not capable of or is less likely to take responsibility for his or her actions and behaviors. When the Locus of Control is internal, the individual is much more likely to accept this responsibility. Consequently, he or she feels a sense of power and responsibility and is able to learn from life experiences.

It has also become evident to us that there is a connection between internal Locus of Control and character development. Character or values education is becoming an essential part of the school curriculum. At the core of this type of education is the assumption that children who possess these assets have a well-developed internal Locus of

Continued, Page 2

Locus of Control, Cont. from Page 1

Control. Sometimes we, at WCPA, are concerned when we see character education programs that we seldom see how these assets will become a part of the student's day-to-day behavior. A curriculum that focuses on internal Locus of Control is going to be much more effective in creating a positive change in character development.

Finally, we believe that children can be taught to develop an internal Locus of Control. However, teachers and parents would need proficiency (which often requires training) in using skills such as:

- Discerning internal from external rewards
- Communication, empathy and listening skills
- Modeling right choices
- Disciplining with consistency and natural and logical consequences
- Allowing children to assume responsibility for their behaviors (i.e. to fail and to experience negative consequences)
- Developing genuine self-esteem

If we could help children to function out of an internal Locus of Control, we would see are children who:

- Are able to problem-solve
- Are resilient
- Have a sense of purpose in life
- Are able to set goals for themselves
- Are able to delay gratification
- Have social competence
- Have a sense of autonomy

We invite you to begin thinking of innovative ways of incorporating this concept into your school curriculum. For more information on this topic or ideas on implementing this type of curriculum in your school, please call us or visit us on the web at www.wcpastl.com.

What will next year bring?

The end of the school year is quickly approaching for teachers, students and administrators. WCPA would like to take this time to encourage you to make plans that will create the climate you want to see at your school next year.

WCPA has many services that can easily be incorporated into next school year. For example, several schools have begun providing mandatory parent meetings on issues involving parenting skills and student safety. There has been a dramatic increase in requests for bullying and changing school climate programs. We have begun parenting groups called "Beyond Baptism" for parishes wishing to encourage parental involvement in the early childhood years. Of course, WCPA continues to offer Care Teams, trainings, consultation groups and affordable, on-site school counselors.

Summer is a great time to look at programs you would like to have in place for next school year. *A therapist from WCPA can meet with you over the summer to give you more information on our programs and assist you with program selection.* Please feel free to contact us at 314-275-8599.

Social Skills Groups at WCPA

WCPA would like to give a special thank you to all teachers and administrators who have referred students to our social skills groups over the past two years. Your support is greatly appreciated! When you work with a student who just doesn't seem to be "getting it," encourage the parents to call and let us assess the child's needs. Parents and teachers report seeing real changes in their students' behaviors within the first three months of attending group. These positive results not only have a positive affect on the student's peer relationships but also their classroom behavior and behavior at home. Social skills groups empower those students who feel like they don't belong to have a safe place to learn and to grow with other kids who feel exactly the same way. It is also an affordable option for those families who want to help their children but may have financial difficulties holding them back.

Students who benefit the most from social skills groups typically have one or more of the following characteristics:

- Very bright students, who prefer spending time with adults rather than children their own age;
- Students who have an Asperger's Disorder diagnosis;
- Children who are frequently targeted for bullying or who bully others;
- Students who attempt to engage with their peers but who consistently say or do the wrong things even after intervention attempts by adults; and/or
- EXTREMELY shy students.

If you have concerns about a particular student or students, do not hesitate to call our office. Spaces are currently available in both the male and female groups. Groups meet twice per month at the WCPA office, and many different payment options are available. For more information, contact Jennifer Gauvain, MSW, LCSW.

Bullying – Change an Attitude, Change Your School

If bullying seems to be a bigger and bigger issue at your school these days, take heart. You are not alone. Schools everywhere are beginning to sit up and take notice of the "peer abuse" that seems to be going on in so many of our classrooms. As a result, anti-bullying programs are being sought and used more than ever before and books like "Queen Bees and Wannabes" are making it to the bestseller list. But when a school's administrator decides that enough is enough, what can be done to truly improve the peer climate in a given school?

As in many facets of life, the first step here can be the toughest. In a nutshell, before the attitudes of students toward one other can change, change is often required on the part of school professionals. The old adage was, "Boys will be boys. Why intervene? Kids need to learn to handle their problems themselves. It's a natural part of growing up." How can we demand safety, civility and respect from our students when we minimize the problem or assume it is a normal part of childhood? Before we can expect our students to change their behaviors, we as school professionals must accurately understand the problem and have attitudes that are realistic and helpful.

Truly addressing this problem requires that administrators and teachers possess the attitudes that:

1. Bullying is serious and can lead to disastrous consequences.
2. Bullying victims need and deserve adult intervention and help.
3. Bullies will keep on bullying unless adults do something about it.
4. It is up to adults to create an atmosphere that says **Bullying is unacceptable at our school.**

If you are an administrator, what can you do to assure that each of your teachers holds these attitudes? Talk openly in faculty meetings about your beliefs about bullying and the policies your school has in place to combat it. Make it clear that you expect each adult in the building to follow-through with those policies and that you want to be kept informed about students who bully others. Consider a faculty inservice on the topic, to learn the facts and engage discussion.

When each adult in a school exemplifies these attitudes, it shows. It shows through consistently-followed policies regarding all types of bullying – physical, sexual, verbal, social, and "cyber" (or "online") bullying. Students know that even teasing, gossiping or excluding others will merit a consequence. Administrators know that children who bully peers often have parents who try to bully the school, and are prepared to support their teachers when parents are unhappy about a given consequence. Supervision is increased in less structured areas like hallways and the recess yard, and victims are given support and referrals to appropriate interventions, such as social skills groups.

If you are considering how to respond to the problem of bullying in your school community, let us know. We can discuss many options, from faculty and parent presentations to classroom workshops and at-risk social skills groups.