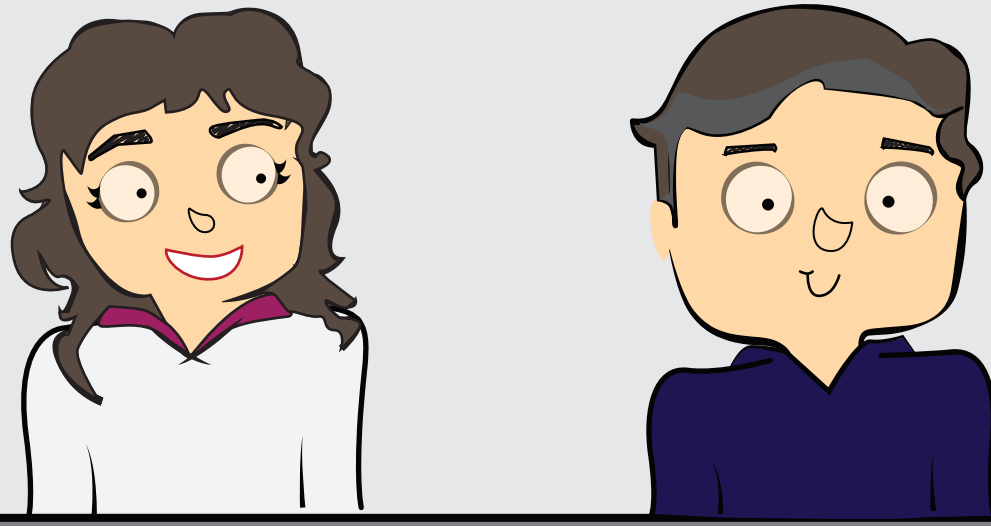
new realities
SPED AHEAD
new choices

Dialogues on Change



Leading changemakers in special education and behavior management share their insights to your most pressing questions.

PresenceLearning

Executive Summary

In 2015, more than 30,000 special education leaders, teachers, parents, and related services professionals registered for our spring and fall webinar series. Throughout the year, we explored the need for change in education: change in the ways we manage classrooms, change in the ways we collaborate with families and our peers in general education, and change in the ways we support our students' mental emotional needs.

After each webinar, we sat down with our speakers to discuss top questions from the audience. This new paper combines these conversations in one downloadable resource. In this resource, you will hear answers to your burning questions from:

- Trip Hawkins and Janice Toben, M.Ed.
- Dr. Marty Burns
- Dr. Barry Prizant and Amy Laurent
- Dr. Barry Prizant
- Dr. Joe Ryan
- Dr. Daniel Crimmins and Dr. Michael Gamel-McCormick

We hope you enjoy reading these dialogues as much as we enjoyed having them.

– *PresenceLearning*

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If a player is a bully in real life, playing the game could be very helpful to tune them into why they are behaving this way. The game will teach them why bullying is not effective to their own self progress and provide them with alternative tools and skills they can use to be more successful.

How Games Can Help Children with Special Needs Develop Critical Life Skills: A Dialogue with Trip Hawkins and Janice Toben, M.Ed.

Our first Special Agents of Change webinar, "How Games Can Help Children with Special Needs Develop Critical Life Skills" with gaming pioneer Trip Hawkins and Co-Founder of the Institute for Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Janice Toben sparked a lively discussion about gaming, SEL and their role in special education.

Trip Hawkins
Founder of Electronic Arts, Digital Chocolate and If You Can

Janice Toben
M.Ed. Educational Consultant and Co-Founder of the Institute for SEL

What age and cognitive range can this game be used for?

TH When we designed IF… The Emotional IQ Game, we designed it with an age range starting from early reading and expanding through middle school. We had the idea that any student who wants to make his or her own choices about his or her learning methods could play the game. We actually found that because SEL skills are so generally needed, even older students are playing it. We discovered that the game appealed to people on a very wide age range, but I think the perfect sweet spot for it is elementary school.

JT The game can be also be played alongside with and held together with an adult, when the reading comprehension piece is an issue.

How does the game work for students on the autism spectrum? Also, what do you think about designing games for students on the spectrum and what results you are seeing in this population?

The great thing about this product design for children with special needs is that it is very easy to operate. It is something the user can do independently, which is very empowering. It builds confidence. It does not require advanced reading or advanced game playing skills. When we start looking at the types of conditions that students are diagnosed with, there are different SEL tools that apply to different categories of need. For example, students with ADHD most likely are having challenges with listening and being patient. They tend to interrupt more often in social situations, so these situations are simulated often in the game so players can get feedback about their behavior. That is one of the great things about the game. It gives the player a variety of choices on how to react to situations. Then, when he or she makes a good choice, the game positively reinforces that choice. When the player makes an inappropriate choice, the game will tell the player why it is inappropriate and then loop back to give him or her a chance to pick a better answer. So for a student with ADHD, he or she will potentially learn practices for calming down, meditation, being patient, being a better listener and more. For a student with Asperger's, the game is going to address a different set of issues including social situations and the appropriate behaviors in those situations. Obviously, there are a lot of different kinds of conditions associated with the autism spectrum and I think a game design like this naturally taps into any child's desire to enjoy a game, have fun and make progress to feel like they are accomplishing things, so this game can be helpful to almost any type of condition.

For students with developmental delays, there may be times during the game in which they experience frustration due to harder-to-navigate situations or negative feedback. It is at this point that the game's ability to teach skills to maintain composure and become self-aware are important. The game teaches players to use a set of skills within the SEL toolkit to self-regulate and calm down, which is important for real life situations.

There is great sensitivity and intensity that sometimes comes along with children with special needs. The game gives students a way to step back and look at emotion through the characters, and actually learn about an emotion and then internalize skills for coping. For the students I knew who were on the spectrum, often their great intellect was sometimes frustrated by any suggestions of reflecting on the emotion in the moment, so we have to vary our experiences with students. We have to bring in movement and art while we are bringing in technology to respond to their individuality.

The world of gaming can be especially helpful for children who experienced some type of trauma or abuse. What role could this game play for a second grader who is distant, aggressive and rarely connects with other children?

That's a heartbreaking situation. The first priority we have when creating a game like this is safety and having the student feel protected and supported. I think a benefit of this game to a student in this situation is that the game experience is completely private. Because of this, the game starts out in a very gentle way. The early part of it is a tutorial that helps the player get acquainted with the game format. Even for students without a traumatic past, starting school can be overwhelming. When a child is accustomed to living at home and being in their private family residence, it can be pretty chaotic to drop into a classroom for the first time because there are a lot of brand new social issues, responsibilities, and rules to follow. It generally could be very challenging for most children. Add this stress to a student who has a traumatic past? It is going to be much harder for them to be able to be calm, focused and relaxed in that climate, especially if it reminds them of the traumatic experiences they had. The game provides the student with a fairly gentle, private and supportive way to rebuild confidence.

One chapter of the game focuses on this notion of having an inner ally and developing positive self-talk, which is a very powerful tool for both adults and children. The notion that sometimes our own self-thoughts can bring us down and not be helpful to us is a powerful concept and we must learn how to be an inner ally of support for ourselves. This is not all a panacea for everything we are talking about, nor is it going to be completely therapeutic for a child who has undergone that trauma, but that concept is a very important one and could be very helpful in building resilience.

In addition to just dealing with everyday situations, there may be instances when a student with special needs deals with bullying. When we refer to bullying, we often identify a bully and then a victim, but in a way, they are both alienated and they are both victims. Because of this, we designed the game to address bullying. Over the course of playing the game, students are going to develop a lot of awareness and skills about bullying that they may not have developed otherwise. If a player is a bully in real life, playing the game could be very helpful to tune them into why they are behaving this way. The game will teach them why bullying is not effective to their own self progress and provide them with alternative tools and skills they can use to be more successful.

What are your favorite low-tech ways to work on SEL skills?

Let's start off with a few no-tech approaches. Practicing positive affirmation, self-talks and appreciations throughout the day is really powerful and important. Additionally, we can engage in nature to practice a sense of awe and wonder, which is also a huge low-tech way to practice SEL skills. The science of awe is being studied at the Greater Good Science Center of Berkeley. It is very powerful and interesting to see how this can change our mindset and bring down cortisol levels. And obviously, practices that involve movement such as yoga are very helpful to people. Any activity that can be considered mindfulness practice can help.

Daily mindfulness is, I think, the center of all this. If you are an adult, of course you need this for yourself. You need to tune into your awareness and figure out what you need to do to self-regulate. Notice your heart rate and your breathing. How can you manage yourself and communicate more effectively? And of course, if you were around kids or even other adults, being able to manage yourself in this way is the most important thing. I would say in terms of other effective tools, I personally benefited from some really great books that help readers develop a kinder internal voice like Kristin Neff's "Self-Compassion: The Proven Power of Being Kind to Yourself." Also, books by Buddhist thinkers help readers realize what we have control over and what we don't, as well as how to be kinder in that internal voice.

There are three tools I love to use The World's Most Popular Self-Expression Game with my family, one of them being the Ungame, The World's Most Popular Self-Expression Game. It is just a great conversation starter. You wouldn't think that children of all ages, including teens, would like this game, but I have children who ask to play this game regularly and all my children have really loved it. Two more specific SEL tools that are in a form of a deck of cards are Think, Feel, Act Cards and Wonder Kids Cards. Both are a complete tools to use when trying to help someone work on a problem or to simply generate a brainstorming conversation that can go deeper.

For parents, another one has to do with interacting with your child in the home. Though this is not always possible by any means, instead of calling across the room or around the corner or down the hallway, actually walk to your child and maybe get down eye-to-eye with them. This just gets back those subtle connective pieces that we are missing more and more of in our culture. Just deciding to do this one thing will create a different value and attentiveness around your common response of your children over time.

What is the cost of IF… The Emotional IQ Game?

The game is organized into chapters. Chapter 1 is free and additional chapters cost roughly $5 for home users with Apple devices. The company is developing a school and professional version (including support for PC and Mac users) that may be priced differently. For more information, visit: http://ifyoucan.org/.

Trip Hawkins founded and built the legendary games company, Electronic Arts, and played a key role in the early days of Apple. Today, he is redefining SEL as the Co-Founder and CEO of If You Can, a maker of educational games for social and emotional learning.

Janice Toben is an educational consultant and the Co-Founder of the Institute for SEL. She works with schools nationwide to promote positive school climate through the skills of social and emotional intelligence. She is the former director of SEL at the Nueva School. Janice serves as a content expert and advisor for the company, If You Can.

One of the reasons rewards work for unmotivated children is they are rewarded for an effort that goes into doing work, as opposed to only looking at the outcome of what they do.

The New Science of Learning: Effective Approaches for Older Students with Autism and Attention Disorders: A Dialogue with Dr. Marty Burns

In the webinar "The New Science of Learning: Effective Approaches for Older Students with Autism and Attention Disorders," ASHA Fellow and neuroscientist Dr. Marty Burns answered audience questions centered around the current research and tools available for building cognitive function in those individuals with attention disorders or autism.

Martha S. Burns
Ph.D., Scientific
Learning Corporation &
Northwestern University

Are we setting children up for failure by pushing them to take medications while they are young? Should we be teaching them strategies to cope with attention that will carry over into adulthood?

There is quite a bit of research on effectiveness of medication right now. We know from several studies done through the American Psychiatric Association and American Pediatric Association that medication by itself is not enough for ensuring attention. We also know from a study conducted six to seven years ago that medication is most effective for about 14 months because the brain then adapts. Additionally, earlier multi-setting trials conducted 10 to 15 years ago showed that medications are most effective when students also receive behavioral strategies.

There is a lot of cognitive technology out there now to help teach these behavioral or cognitive strategies. For example, AvMed has been very effective with ADHD and an independent research study out of the research labs in Oregon found that the intervention technology called Fast ForWard is also effective with attention. It is important that we deploy these cognitive interventions to help students develop coping strategies. That is what is going to carry them through in the long run.

Is there any current research on the effectiveness of lecture styles – those with visual presentation materials versus those without – for students with attention issues?

There is not much good research on presentation modes and their effectiveness to date. Educators have all sorts of devices that they can use in the classroom. Although this technology is becoming more popular, we do not have controlled research helping us understand how visuals help. The research right now is more on methodology, not on visuals.

In general, neuroscience research shows that teachers who use cognitive interventions are most effective. These methods include: how the teacher gets the child's attention and keeps the child's attention, how the teacher reinforces students individually, and how the teacher uses novelty. Sometimes, visuals can be novel, but it is it's the combination with cognitive interventions that is most effective for students in terms of them changing their brain.

Does listening to music or physical activity during independent work help students regulate their behavior?

Again, we do not have much good, current research on the value of listening to music while working to regulate behavior. An old study on the Mozart effect found that older students who listened to Mozart saw some improvement on performance. Out of Northwestern, my colleague Nina Kraus conducted some outstanding research on the value of musical training for improving students' cognitive skills. However, my general advice would be to not listen to music while working because it is probably more distracting than it is helpful. I do not recommend it, but again, we need some controlled research to really help us determine its effectiveness.

We are in the same situation regarding the effectiveness of physical activity. We need more research to show its value, how often it should occur, how frequently students should take breaks, and more. We do know that physically fit students perform better on high-stakes academic testing and on achievement testing. We also know that physical activity increases something called "brain-derived neurotrophic factor," which is the chemicals in the brain that drive the brain to change and promote neuroplasticity. Activity is important, but activity while learning has not been demonstrated to be more effective or less effective at this point in time.

What standardized tools or informal checklists have you found to be most useful for older students with suspected, but not yet diagnosed, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?

I would like to recommend two tools. Most of you in attendance probably know about the Autism-Spectrum Quotient (AQ). It is my favorite because it is a checklist. If you are not familiar with AQ, students read statements on the checklist and then choose if they agree or disagree with the statement based on the Likert Scale ("definitely agree" to "definitely disagree"). Some of these statements are:

- I prefer to do things with others rather than on my own.
- I prefer to do things the same way over and over again.
- If I try to imagine something, I find it very easy to create a picture in my mind.

Psychology-tools.com has an example of AQ here. AQ was developed by Simon Baron-Cohen almost 15 years ago and is used quite often with older individuals.

Baron-Cohen also developed the "Reading the Mind in the Eyes" test. Individuals taking the test examine a picture of someone's eyes and have to choose one of four possible emotions the pictured person is feeling. Research from the Departments of Experimental Psychology and Psychiatry at the Autism Research Center in Cambridge shows it correlates with the AQ.

Are the intervention approaches you suggested applicable to telepractice?

I do a significant amount of telepractice with adolescents and adults. Currently, I work with four adolescents and young adults using telepractice and almost all of the methods that I have shared with you today work via telepractice. For example, keeping a planner helps students organize their homework and prioritize their time, as well as help them remember to complete tasks. A teacher working with students in person would quickly review students' planners before leaving for the day. With telepractice, I have my students just scan and email me their planners so I can look at them.

Other techniques – like backwards goal setting, triggers and daily morning routines – require additional planning and family training when conducted via telepractice. I teach the families how to help guide their children through these techniques because I am unable to be there in person.

I actually love telepractice because I get to work with both the student and their families.

Are there any approaches that are more effective or different for treating girls with ASD or an attention deficit versus boys with the same needs?

Not that I know of. This is a really good question because girls do present slightly differently than boys, but evidence shows that intervention is most effective when each program is individualized for the student, regardless of their gender.

Someone else asked how to get students to make realistic goals. This is where individualization becomes important. If a student on the autism spectrum says his goal is to be a news reporter, I try to backtrack him a bit to decide on a more realistic goal because the original goal is probably too lofty for him based on his current skills. During interventions, I do not come into the meeting with a fixed idea of what goals the students should have or how that should translate into tactics. Instead, we work on that together and create a plan based on their needs and where they want to go in life.

Almost all students have the capacity for making some realistic goals with some guidance, even if it is something like,"I want to be able to build computer games." Many students will be capable of doing something like that or working for a technology company. That might be a very good, realistic goal for them with which to start.

One attendee noted that older students are often seeking independence and self-determination, so they may sometimes push back against some intervention strategies. What are your suggestions for getting high-functioning students to buy into the strategy being implemented?

This is tough because a big part of what the brain is doing during adolescence is pulling away from rules and structures and adult control and guidance. Because of that, we have to make the process very student-centered by using goals; it cannot be centered in our expectations of the student necessarily. Ultimately, we want our expectations of the student to be met, but we have to have the student see that they are an individual who can accomplish their goals.

Another strategy is finding what is important to the student and incorporating that into the goal. For example, maybe the student's goal is to have more friends. A perfect first step is to go to the movies with a friend on Friday night. We then start talking about how the student can accomplish this short-term goal, including how to pick the friend, how to pick the movie, what to do if the friend wants to pick the movie, and how to compromise. We always bring it back to what is important to them.

We all live such distracted lives these days. How do the strategies you suggest for maintaining attention translate to life after school, particularly in the workplace?

Actually, I'm working with a couple of adults right now in work-related settings. I have one young man who has a history of drug abuse. He just finished a drug rehabilitation program and we are doing the same kind of attention and organizational activities that I do with high school students. We used backwards goal-setting to set realistic goals for him. This includes discussion of how he is going to find a job, what kind of job search he is going to do, how he is going to strategize for interviews, how he is developing his resume, and more. The only difference between working with adults and working with high school students is the content.

Is it true that watching too much television at an early age contributes to attention disorders?

There is some preliminary research from a few years ago suggesting that students who have increased screen time are at more risk for attention deficit disorder (ADD). However, this was not a controlled study, so we do not know if the students were diagnosed with ADD because they had more screen time or if they had more screen time because their ADD was emerging.

The American Pediatric Association (APA) provides information and recommendations for screen time. Go to their website www.aap.org and search for "managing media." Here you will find commentary about excessive media exposure. This includes not only television exposure, but exposure to technology like smartphones and tablets. Excessive media exposure has been associated with obesity, lack of sleep, school problems, aggression, and behavioral issues. APA cites some of this research on their website and also recommends that parents and teachers not only monitor the amount of time children spend with these media devices, but also content. There is good content on television, but there is also bad content.

Generally, APA recommends no more than two hours of screen/media time a day. I like to tell parents that the best way to use media is as a reward. TV or computer time should be a reward after homework is done or after meal-time. APA also recommends that children should not have televisions or other technology in their bedrooms, so students do not stay up at night.

One listener has a child who has a history of failing grades and thinks that no amount of effort will make an impact. How do you motivate children who seem not to care anymore?

This is actually more common than you might think. The vast majority of adolescents I work with have given up. They have repeatedly failed in school or received poor grades. Students know which students teachers think are smart. They figure this out at a young age and they start to get discouraged very easily.

The neuroscience field has conducted extensive research on the effectiveness of rewards. One of the reasons rewards work for unmotivated children is they are rewarded for the effort that goes into doing work as opposed to only looking at the outcome of what they do. For example, students should be rewarded for handing in their paper on time, as opposed to getting a good grade on the paper. Incorporating these incentives, rather than punishments, is helpful for unmotivated students.

Another thing that can be very helpful, again, is technology programs, particularly programs created by neuroscientists, as they are designed to reward the student. These games keep the student engaged and encouraged because they allow the student to be correct about 80 percent of the time, which makes them feel successful. I have had many students who used these programs who then suddenly have a boost in their self-confidence and in their belief that they can learn.

You showed some great tools for helping students become more organized, but how do I help very intelligent high school students with ASD and ADHD want to become more organized? Is that possible without intrinsic motivation?

Generally speaking, adolescents are not motivated to be organized. They are motivated to have friends, take risks, and otherwise do things we would rather they not do. I also know many adults who are not particularly motivated to be organized. What we have to do in both situations is provide them with organizational structure. I often say to parents and teachers, "You are your students' frontal lobe. You are their organization." If you are organized and if they have a structure, you can very slowly and incrementally incorporate organizational structure that is not overwhelming. Additionally, rewards are what the frontal lobe uses to build itself. It is a reward-centered system that overrides your limbic system. Therefore, incorporating rewards is important when trying to motivate unmotivated students.

Keeping a planner is a great start as it is a simple task that is easily monitored. If you reward the student for simply keeping a planner or something more difficult like keeping an accurate planner, the reward might be something like ordering a pizza or being able to watch an extra half-hour of TV over the weekend. Providing the organizational methods and then rewarding them for sticking to the structure is the key to success. Start small and do not expect them to have everything organized right away.

As the author of over 100 articles and multiple books, neuroscientist Martha S. Burns, Ph.D., is a leading expert on language, brain development, and how children learn. She speaks frequently on the importance of applying the science of learning in early childhood education and the K-12 classroom. Dr. Burns is Adjunct Associate Professor at Northwestern University and a Fellow of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, and has served on the medical staff of Evanston-Northwestern Hospital for 35 years. She has consulted with school districts worldwide on ways to apply neuroscience to best practices in special education.

"We define differentiated learning as bringing learning within the reach of every student in the classroom.

5 Easy Ways to Fail in Education:
A Dialogue with Dr. Frances Stetson

Our Special Agents of Change webinar "5 Easy Ways to Fail in Education" with special education expert Dr. Francis Stetson focused on five major shifts in the thought and practice required of today's school leaders. We sat down with her after the webinar to address a few questions submitted by the webinar participants.

Dr. Frances Stetson
Ph.D., President of Stetson & Associates, Inc.

Full inclusion seems impossible to do completely. Given that, what are the most important steps that we can take to move toward that goal?

FS

I'm glad this question came up and that we're putting it first because we have to go back and define full inclusion. One of the things we have to understand is that the term "full inclusion" is actually going away because it implies it's not individualized for student needs. So, I agree that it seems impossible to do, and it's actually not very student-centered. So if we defined full inclusion as everyone goes into the general education classroom 100% of the day, then I think we've overstepped the boundaries and moved away from what some children need. We have to make certain that we've done everything we can do to make the general education classroom appropriate for all students, if at all possible.

The words co-teaching and inclusion are being used interchangeably in many conversations. Are they the same strategy for special education, or are they different?

Some people have used the terms synonymously. However, inclusion is a much broader concept, under which co-teaching is one of the options, but it's not the only option for supporting students in the general education classroom or across the continuum. Co-teaching is an excellent model, but if we use it exclusively, we are actually in danger of over-supporting students who don't need two teachers in the classroom all the time. It may be that they need support in the general education classroom only three days out of the week instead of five. Or they may benefit immensely from really good accommodations, such as lesson scaffolding, in the general education classroom.

What are some resources or advice you would give for developing and gaining support for team and collaborative teaching?

There are tremendous rewards for students and teachers of classrooms led by more than one adult. Teachers ultimately report less stress because they have a partner in the classroom, which has tremendous advantages. If they are ill one day, there is somebody who knows the classroom. I think the thing we have to deal with more than anything is our own adult issues when we are faced with the opportunity to serve in collaborative teaching role. Anytime we put two adults in the same classroom, there are some predictable problems. One example would be having teachers understand each other's role. They need to remember that they are both certified and qualified and that one is not going to automatically act as an instructional aide instead of a teacher. One of the things that I find important when I go into collaboratively taught classrooms is seeing a teaching model in which one of the teachers is conducting the lesson and the other observes, assists in a very simple way or even sits out on the lesson.

It's important that teachers understand the six models of co-teaching. This is critical for co-teaching classrooms and even less-formal collaborative teaching classrooms. If I enter a classroom as a second teacher and I don't know about all the different techniques we can use to work together, it will impede our effectiveness. For example, if we decide to divide the classroom in half, I know I can do parallel teaching. I can also do smaller group interaction, station teaching and more. Teachers have to keep these six models in the back of their minds as they plan instruction. To learn more about these models, I recommend any written or video resource by Dr. Marilyn Friend. She is a leading expert on collaborative teaching.

Differentiated instruction sounds great, but actually doing it is another matter. What is truly differentiated instruction and how do we get there?

I completely agree with the author of this question. We define differentiated learning as bringing learning within the reach of every student in the classroom. Now of course, that's just another way of describing the job of teaching because that's everyone's role. But if I go into a classroom, I like thinking of this old expression: "If the only tool I have is a hammer, then any problem looks like a nail."

If a teacher is not that diligent as a teacher, then he or she is not going to have many ideas other than whole group instruction, which may not be effective for the entire class. Some types of differentiated instruction include: flexible grouping, cooperative learning groups, conversation circles, and reading triads. However, if teachers are not constantly building their repertoire of strategies and skills, they won't know how to implement these strategies in the classroom. Our school districts need to pay very close attention to coaching teachers by modeling instruction and then sitting down and really working with teachers. It's important for coaches to say, "You don't have to learn it all at once. You can break it into some bite-sized pieces and begin to add more and more strategies." This is not something that is done overnight.

It's also important to reflect and talk about what is working or where teachers are experiencing difficulty. Overall, differentiating instruction, rather than delivering something that we decide is one-size-fits-all, is an incredible advantage. It is so worth the effort and energy – even if it means leaving our teaching comfort zones.

One of our audience members is working on a district-wide plan for reducing disproportionalities for African American males qualifying for emotional-behavioral disorders. What strategies do you recommend to help our listeners develop cultural efficiency?

I understand cultural proficiency and the challenge of disproportionality are huge issues, but honestly, I think it is something that we have a lot to learn about. We have to read about it, talk to colleagues about it, and be extremely open.

FS

For this reason, I've been engaged in some extensive reading about the topic. It has really been incredibly powerful in my personal and professional life to really look at what the white privilege literature is actually saying. It's not saying, "If you are white, you are automatically prejudiced." It is reminding us that the system is stacked against students of color and that it's very important to understand the impact of this both in our schools and in our community. I do think knowing as much as we can about it, talking to others across cultures and races, and then having really open and honest conversations is the best answer.

So much attention is on differentiating instruction for students with special needs. What about finding ways to challenge gifted students?

FS

That's an excellent question for many reasons. We have to remember: it's not good instruction if we are delivering instruction that only benefits one group of students, or maybe even harms the other. One of the biggest worries among teachers, and I understand it fully, is that they will have to water down instruction in order to meet the needs of students who are struggling with the content. What we also need to understand is that we can "water up" instruction for students who need to be challenged.

A tool I think every teacher should download is our Instructional Design Tool (IDT) worksheet. The IDT makes it easy for teachers, given their limited time, to plan a differentiated lesson, as it helps teachers identify and brainstorm modified or additional activities for students who may not fully benefit from the planned lesson as is. In the IDT, teachers identify the lesson's objective(s), instructional strategies/activities, and any students who may need extra support or modifications/accommodations to fully benefit from the planned activity. Teachers can then plan for these modifications/accommodations and/or tweak the lesson.

However, let's say a teacher has a really gifted student who mastered the content of this lesson a long time ago. The teacher would still identify this student as someone who needs accommodations in order to benefit from the lesson. The teacher would then consciously think: What can be added to the student's task to challenge him or her without coming up with an entirely different instructional activity? There are many ways teachers can pick up the level of rigor in a lesson – teachers can add a research component to the lesson, ask the student to conduct teacher interviews for more understanding of the topic, or even conduct community interviews. So there are all kinds of ways teachers can serve gifted students, as well as support the students who aren't quite at grade-level instruction – all while still remaining engaging.

Learning instructors are very overwhelmed by meeting the needs of the Common Core on top of supporting students in the classroom, participating in PLCs and building teams, managing EAs, and completing assessment eligibility and individualized education programs (IEPs). What once was just a very busy job is quickly feeling like an impossible job. Burnout is very real. How do we best step back and regain a vision for what we do?

I'm always talking about things we need to do better. However, there are so many things we do right. I think it's important for all learning specialists and others in similar roles to stop for a minute and say, "I'm doing a really good job. I care about kids and I'm really working hard."

When it comes to burnout, sometimes we don't abandon the things that no longer work. So often we are adding jobs, roles, and ways to accomplish a task, yet we seldom let go of things. You may have heard the term "organized abandonment." What this means is, "What can I take off my plate that is no longer that effective or that useful, that takes up a lot of my time, or keeps me away from the important task?"

Here's my recommendation: it's all like closet cleaning. At least once a year, look over your roles and tasks and decide which of those are really paying off for you and your kids and which of those are distracting you from being productive. If possible, ditch them. Sometimes we can't, but many times we can.

Another thing leaders need to do is attend to the morale and the climate of schools. When someone was really down, my husband used say, "they have an empty bucket." I've found that a lot of people in schools have empty buckets, so they have to find ways to "fill" those buckets. Leaders can do this through rewards, recognition, appreciation, and just being mindful that individuals can't do their jobs without reasonable time or resources. Sometimes it may require restructuring.

What creative ways can you recommend for improving collaboration when there isn't common prep time between special and general educators?

First, go online and search for planning time options or planning time strategies because there are thousands of them. But let's talk about the real problem. The first thing a really good principal does is look for who absolutely needs a common planning period, and they put this into a master schedule first, but the reality is that you cannot have a common planning period with everybody. So, we've coined another phrase: protected planning time. This isn't the planning time as we know it, but it's using creative strategies to find ways for two teachers to collaborate.

For example, let's say a teacher is out sick and needs a substitute for the day. A teacher that needs some planning time with another teacher can ask the substitute to cover her class so they can meet with the other teacher during his planning period and plan, thus creating a makeshift common planning period.

Another creative strategy is identifying a cadre of people – like a media specialist, an assistant principal, a curriculum coordinator – and then setting them up on a rotating schedule of planning periods. Once a week or once every two weeks, one of those people will rotate and join their colleagues during this common planning period.

So do the research. I've used this phrase forever, but missing planning time – whether it's common or protected – is like being given a luxury car with four flat tires. You can't get that car down the road. It is not effective or enjoyable for the teachers and students.

Our model seems outdated and we would like to restructure how we meet students' needs. Where do we start updating our system?

Let's look back to the first way to fail in special education: losing your vision. We have some outdated practices so we have to keep working and developing new models. If our vision is to help students with special needs, then the first step to doing that is deciding what is not effective. For example, our system consists of a lot of pull-out programs and self-contained programs. We visit maybe hundreds of classrooms every year to conduct program evaluations, and there are students in pull-out or self-contained settings that really shouldn't be there. Some students have to repeat IEP goals over and over again in order to accomplish them. So I think the first step is to recognize that the current traditional system may not work for the majority of our children. These students may benefit better from something like inclusion. Inclusive practices can be very powerful and important. It's research-based, reasonable and it's not an "all-or-nothing" proposition. I want to encourage people to get excited about it, know how beneficial it is, and how it can really provide night and day effects for students.

However, the bottom line is that it's the law that children with disabilities shall be educated to the greatest extent appropriate with their non-disabled peers. So I think people start inclusion programs because it's the right thing to do and we're excited about it, but I think some folks have to revisit the idea. While there will still be some children who need time outside of the general education classroom for part of the day to meet some very specialized needs, the great majority of our students blossom and do so much better in a general education classroom.

Dr. Frances Stetson is President of Stetson & Associates, Inc., an educational consulting firm that supports systems change in schools. She and her staff have helped thousands of school districts discover new ways to deliver high quality services. Frances is an expert on inclusive practices, on differentiated instruction and on leadership strategies for struggling learners. She worked for the Texas Education Agency and for the US Dept of Education and conducted research and national training programs on least restrictive environment and inclusionary approaches to special education.

One of the big differences with the Uniquely Human approach is that we don't start by categorizing behaviors as desirable or undesirable. We start with really asking what I refer to as the "deep question of why," from the person's perspective, why they might be doing something, and how can we change environments in our practices.

Uniquely Human: A Different Way to See Autism and Create Pathways to Success: A Dialogue with Dr. Barry Prizant

Our Special Agents of Change webinar "Uniquely Human: A Different Way to See Autism and Create Pathways to Success" with one of the world's leading authorities on autism, Dr. Barry Prizant, covered a new perspective and approach to understanding and treating students with autism. After the webinar, Dr. Prizant addressed a number of audience questions. Their discussion follows.

Barry M. Prizant
Ph.D., Childhood Communication Services & Adjunct Professor, Brown University

It's no surprise that you've sparked a lot of interest among our listeners. Let's start with our first question. How does your Uniquely Human approach to autism differ from applied behavior analysis (ABA) therapy?

Let me begin by saying that first of all, ABA therapy is not just one specific strategy, and those practitioners who are trained in ABA know that there are many different versions and sub-categories under ABA. Also, let me clarify that the Uniquely Human approach isn't so much a therapy approach with designated techniques to follow. If you're looking for designated techniques to follow, the SCERTS Model includes an assessment and intervention paradigm.

Anyway, some of the differences that I would really highlight have to do with differences in what we refer to as "traditional ABA." Many traditional ABA approaches, and even some contemporary ABA approaches, measure progress as the reduction or elimination of behaviors considered to be autistic behaviors. Of course, the focus is also often on building positive skills.

BP

A few days ago, I had the wonderful opportunity to give a keynote address at the National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disability Services conference with Julia Bascom, the Deputy Executive Director of the Autism Self Advocacy Network (ASAN). We were having a discussion about the evolution of ABA approaches and the so many positive changes that have happened over the years, and she said this to me:

"The problem I have as a self-advocate, and that my association still has, is that the goal of ABA therapy is to make people with autism look and behave normally, but the Uniquely Human approach really does understand that there may be behavioral patterns that people with autism engage in that look different and unconventional, but might actually be helpful to them. We just can't categorize behaviors on the surface as desirable or undesirable. If a student has to do certain activities or pace or move to self-calm, then these behaviors should be built into the program."

That is one of the big differences with the Uniquely Human approach. We don't start by categorizing behaviors as desirable or undesirable; we start with really asking what I refer to as the "deep question of why," from the person's perspective, why they might be doing this, and how can we change environments in our practices. That's another big difference: we have to really look at how we change our behavior in terms of interpersonal supports and learning supports, and it goes into a lot more than just the very common ABA practice of setting up reinforcement schedules and how faithful we are in following those schedules.

In the Uniquely Human approach, we feel we need to be much, much more flexible by constantly reading a student's emotional regulatory status, and really getting to know that student as they develop mentally, which is another big difference. The Uniquely Human approach is steeped very deeply in research on child and human development and differences that we see in people with autism and learning differences, and we want to understand and honor those learning differences.

Lastly, the Uniquely Human approach focuses on self-determination and giving as much control as possible to a person with autism. I always found it interesting that the teacher-directed practices often make decisions for students with autism when they're very young, but then when these individuals reach the teenage years, there is a shift in focus towards self-determination and choice. By this point, we have taught students to be passive and to respond when prompted to because we've made the decisions for them up until this point.

I don't want to overly generalize ABA because it is such a wide range of practices, but in general, these are the differences that I see and certainly the differences that many people with autism see, especially those who are self-advocates.

Some people think that ABA is the only way to work with children with ASD. What's your advice for those who really think there's only one way, or who may not be open to alternate methods?

ABA has made many positive contributions to the emerging and current practices in autism, but when we hear ABA is the only way to treat ASD – and we still do hear from some practitioners and see on some agencies' websites – it is not factually correct. Major reviews of interventions in autism have indicated that based upon the current level of methodology and research, we cannot make that statement. It is true that other development and relationship-based approaches were not around at the beginning, so good research to demonstrate the efficacy of those approaches was nonexistent, but that has changed. Now there is efficacy data available on relationship-based approaches, as well.

I actually published a three-part article on this a few years ago and one of the sections was called, "Is ABA the Only Way?" In terms of treatment options and parent choice, and if we are truly family centered in our practice, we should not be telling parents that ABA is the only approach, or, especially with the research base now, that this is the only approach that works. Different approaches have different goals and a different culture surrounding that approach.

For example, in ABA, there has been traditionally more of a focus on teaching school-readiness skills, cognitive skills, and so forth, whereas in other approaches, there has been much more of a focus on developing relationships with other children and developing social skills. Now there are hybrid approaches. As a matter of fact, there's a new category called naturalistic behavioral developmental intervention (NBDI) approaches, which focuses on skill-building as well as relationships: peer relationships in schools, inclusion, and so forth. I find it interesting that in a recent article on the NBDI approaches, the authors included SCERTS as an ABA-based approach, which it really isn't. It's a developmentally-based approach, but this coming together is very, very positive.

I think it's very important for practitioners to be aware of and receive training in many practices. With the SCERTS Model, we say one of the predictors of a good practitioner is a person who's been trained in many different approaches, including contemporary ABA approaches.

ABA is so entrenched in reimbursement mechanisms and policies. What do you see as the path forward for SCERTS and other evidence-based methodologies to receive at least equal treatment and economic reimbursement?

Both Julia, who I mentioned before, and ASAN's founder and director, Ari Ne'eman, have made it one of their major missions to bring more recent research to policy makers and to agencies that create the policies to demonstrate there are other evidence-based practices besides ABA.

On the policy level, I think the policymakers really need to be educated more about the current palette of approaches that are out there for individuals with autism. If you look at contemporary ABA practices, they have become more contemporary because leaders in contemporary ABA, such as the Koegels at UC Santa Barbara and Gail McGee at Emory, have pulled a great deal from developmental literature and child- and family-centered literature. I believe when people just hear ABA they think of it as being one thing, but these hybrid approaches have really helped to bridge the gap. So now, we need to educate policymakers so they do not base decisions on old information.

Let's go from the policy level to something more in the trenches. What is your advice for handling physical aggression toward the special education team from children with autism?

Let's define aggression. I have found that very often in my consulting, a student will be called aggressive, and when I actually observe an instance that meets the definition of aggression, such as striking out against another person causing physical harm, that there are other triggers. Aggression is not something that lives within the child. It might be that the child is touched unexpectedly and the child almost reflexively strikes out if they're very tactilely defensive. If we define aggression very narrowly, in terms of the child intending to hurt others rather than simply engaging in behavior that may result in harm to others, we have to look at the purposes or function of the behavior.

A lot of what is defined as aggressive behavior falls into the categories of protest behavior or refusal behaviors. We do know that offering choices, whenever possible, is one way to reduce challenging behavior like aggressive behavior. If we try to impose decisions on kids such as, "You have to eat this food," or, "You have to get online right now," you're likely to get pushback, which might be aggressive or resistant behavior.

From the Uniquely Human perspective, we have to ask what our role is and question why we are seeing these patterns of behavior only with certain people or certain environments. I think prevention, of course, is the way we need to go. Now for those students who do demonstrate physical aggression, even after preventative supports are put in place, staff members need to be trained on a hands-off approach as much as possible. This teaches educators how not to throw gasoline on the fire, while keeping the aggressive students, as well as other staff and students, safe.

Finally, we have to look at what may lead to this aggressive behavior including biological, psychological, and social variables.

A few examples of a biological variable would be if the child is in pain. Psychological variables would be if there is an irregularity in a child's life or if someone tries to touch them when they are tactilely defensive. An example of a social variable is if the child is in a socially overwhelming environment to the point where he or she feels the need to fight to survive.

For example, Ros Blackburn, a well-respected speaker on autism, was considered aggressive when she was young, but it was only caused by social variables. If Ros was in a noisy, busy room and needed to leave, anyone who tried to stop her wouldn't be seen as a person. She would see them as a six-foot chunk of wood and would knock them over to get out of that room because she was in her fight or flight mode.

That's another thing that I don't think is really honored enough. Due to the neurological challenges, many people with autism are much more likely to reach that fight or flight survival level, and yet we still see it as behavior that is under the child's or person's control.

Let's talk about this from the classroom teacher's perspective. What skills can teachers develop or work on to help include children with autism into mainstream instruction?

Utilizing students' strengths and acknowledging what a student likes to do is a very, very significant issue. This is easier with students who are older because it becomes clearer what their strengths and interests are. I have seen some pretty great turnarounds in terms of success of a child in a classroom when their strengths and interests were infused into academics and social activities with other students.

Another important skill is being able to understand the learning style of students with autism. It wasn't until a couple of decades ago that we found out that most individuals with autism benefit greatly from multi-modal teaching, including visual instruction and visual cues and supports. This could help a student who has such a different learning style that they could benefit from different input modalities.

I think it's also important that teachers understand emotional regulation and that it's what keeps a child most available for learning and engaging with others. Teachers have to understand that a child with autism may need systematic breaks throughout the day more so than a typically developing child. Although, research is now indicating that all students can benefit from exercise and movement so it may be beneficial for all students to take breaks throughout the day.

Lastly, being a team leader is essential, because I never think of a classroom teacher, an SLP, an OT, or a school psychologist as individual people on an island unto themselves. If there are support people in the classroom for a student with autism or other students, does the teacher have the skills to know when to seek support from them? Educators need to still lead the lesson while reading those subtle nonverbal cues that indicate a child is getting antsy and may need a break. Being at the head of the class and knowing the students well enough will help the team help the educators and the students.

How can we best support students with ASD as they transition to work and college knowing that society will expect them to conform to social norms?

This is one of those topics that is at the forefront of concern right now. There is more money being put into research on this topic now, and there's more consideration for transition programs now. Knowing that society will expect young adults with autism to conform to social norms — we're working on that with students all along but we be developmentally appropriate and we have to pick our battles. Sometimes we focus on rather inconsequential patterns of behavior that we want to change in people with autism, just so others won't question their behavior. However, there are many other patterns of behavior, such as knowing how to engage socially or knowing how to greet others, that make them more desirable partners. When they go into a workplace with these skills, they can make friends and work partners.

Certainly a big issue right now is matching the strengths and the learning style of people with autism to potential work opportunities. We know there are certain skills that certain people with autism might have that fit very, very well into the requirements of different work opportunities. To help place people with autism in the workforce, there are wonderful, innovative programs looking for mentoring arrangements for people with autism in the film or computer industry, for example. There's a lot of interest in mentorships. So, rather than just providing general training to a person with autism, these programs make sure they are able to develop a relationship with somebody so they can trust in helping them develop skills.

There are even innovative internship programs for those individuals who are much more challenged in their behavior, but are still able to perform in different work settings. For example, some individuals with autism who are nonverbal or who use speech-generating devices work in stores such as CVS Pharmacy, where they are able to stock the shelves and more. One person who worked with a young man with autism at a drug store told me he kept the shelves neater than they had ever seen in that pharmacy before.

Stephen Shore, a man with autism who also has a doctorate in special education, talks a great deal about matching the developmental profile and the learning strengths of a person with autism to a possible job setting or vocation, but that's not enough.

Let me just tell you something from my personal experience. A young man I knew was diagnosed with autism when he was three, and is now in his mid-20s. He had the skills and really enjoyed working in bakeries, decorating children's birthday cakes. However, he found that if there was a very tense, stressful environment in one of the bakeries where he worked, he could not work. He felt the tension and the anxiety from the other staff, and even though he liked the work, the environment was not conducive to him staying well-regulated emotionally. Eventually, he was able to go to a calmer environment where he able to use his skills.

Dr. Barry Prizant is a frequent presenter with the PresenceLearning SPED Ahead webinar program, and an expert on behavior therapy and approaches. He has, for over 25 years, been on the front lines helping educators understand how to compassionately help children succeed in school and beyond. He is one of the world's leading authorities for advising families. In August, 2015 by Simon & Schuster released his book Uniquely Human: A Different Way of Seeing Autism. The book has received critical acclaim and has propelled Barry into the limelight with dozens of interviews on TV, radio and in publications.

Even the most challenging teachers, parents, and administrators will believe the data.

Beyond Behavior: Creating a Culture for Data-Driven Behavioral Interventions: A Dialogue with Dr. Joe Ryan

Our Real School Climate Change: News Approaches For Better Behavior webinar series kicked off with behavior disorder expert Dr. Joe Ryan. During "Beyond Behavior: Creating a Culture for Data-Driven Behavioral Interventions," Dr. Ryan addresses maladaptive behavior using data-driven solutions. In the following dialogue, Dr. Ryan answers audience questions.

Joseph B. Ryan
Ph. D. Clemson University

What behavior assessments and universal screeners do you suggest we use, and what is the best way to roll these out in our schools?

That's a great question. I am personally fond of what's called the systematic screening for behavior disorders (SSBD). The reason I like the SSBD is its gated procedure helps identify problem behaviors – even those that aren't as noticeable. For example, many educators are good at identifying those students with externalizing behaviors. If I said, "Close your eyes and think of the most challenging student that you have," everybody would think of that student with ADHD or that student who is always acting out in class. However, we typically under-identify those students with internalizing behaviors. These behaviors are typically depression or not participating in class. These students can go for years without proper identification and services that would help them succeed in school.

JR

There are three gate procedures in the SSBD. First, I meet with the teachers of each grade level and ask them to bring a roster of their entire class. I describe internalizing behaviors (putting their head down and not talking with others) and externalizing behaviors (acting out, physical aggression, verbal aggression) and ask the educator to create a list of those students who internalize and those who externalize. By categorizing every student into one of these groups, it helps identify those students who may have gone unidentified.
Then, I ask the educator to rank each group from those students who exhibit these behaviors the most to those students who exhibit these behaviors the least.

Lastly, the educator fills out a check list for the top three students in each group. It asks questions about the type of behaviors, the extent the student displays these behaviors, and it gauges whether the student's externalizing or internalizing behavior is clinically significant. If it is clinically significant, we go and observe the student.

It's a very effective method for screening every child in the school because, basically, you're not waiting for the fire to flare up. Instead, you're always running with the fire extinguisher. You're identifying students who display both externalizing and internalizing behaviors, and we can provide services to them before it exacerbates and they start failing in school.

This next question ties into the resource sheet that we sent to everyone who registered to attend your webinar. What computer-based programs or tools can you recommend to confidentially keep track of behavioral data?

JR

It's so easy to find a tracking solution these days. Even the Clemson LIFE (Learning is for Everyone) program I work with has partnered with the computer college here at Clemson to develop applications just for the Clemson LIFE program. I suggest reaching out to your local college's programming department to help develop apps. The students benefit just as much as you do because they need that as part of their work assignment.

If you're looking for a program that is already developed, I included ClassDojo, Behavior Pro, and more on the resource sheet.

Given that maladaptive behaviors are sometimes enabled at home, how do we use the clinician's approach to intervention consistently, and how do we get parents and families on board?

Ever since I've been in the teaching field, this challenge has been very common. However, it's actually a pretty simple solution in many respects because we've all done this before. As a student yourself, did you act differently in certain classrooms than you did in others? Were you an angel for your favorite teacher and then less angelic in another teacher's class? This happens because students discriminate between the environments. They know they can get away with certain behaviors in certain environments, including when they are home with their parents. We can combat this by continuing to promote the pro-social behaviors and the behavior management roles that they have set in place.

As for the second part of the question, there are several different strategies for addressing how to get parents who are not on board to change. I have found it fairly successful to first share some of the behavioral strategies with the parents, and then suggest that they participate in parent training programs. Some more common ones are the Parent Management Training – Oregon Model (PMTO), developed by Dr. Gerald Patterson and his colleagues at the Oregon Social Learning Center (OSLC) and Dr. Russell Barkley's series of parent training programs for managing defiant children and understanding the defiant child.

The key to both programs is they teach five parenting skills:

- **Encouragement:** Teaching children new behaviors through praise and incentives
- **Limit-Setting:** Responding to problem behaviors through negative, non-physical consequences
- **Monitoring & Supervision:** Tracking behavior in different settings
- **Family Problem Solving**: An organized method of making decisions with family input
- **Positive Parent Involvement:** Parent demonstrating interest, care, and attention for the child

Basically, it's the same strategies as applied behavior analysis: positive reinforcement, shaping behavior, consistency — everything that we work on in good behavior management in the school. It shows you how to do this with real families and it shares examples of families who have had success with implementing it.

It's difficult to intervene on a specific maladaptive behavior when it can be misconstrued as attention-seeking. How can you prove it's something else going on?

We must understand that many behaviors serve multiple behaviors, especially for those students who are low functioning and nonverbal. But after further observation, you can start to see the storyline, and sometimes the behavior may reveal a trend. What's important is going into the observation with a neutral mindset. A classroom teacher may think the behavior is purely attention-seeking, but you may find that the function of the target behavior is actually avoidance. This observation data collection helps determine the proper function of that behavior.

How can we best help students with aggressive and violent behavior so that the other people in that environment do not get hurt?

This is especially important for those students who are dealing with emotional behavioral disorders. I recommend most that staff complete a crisis de-escalation training program. Now, I'm going to caveat that. I wrote a consumer report guide for different training programs. There are more than 20 programs across the nation right now. Some are good, but there are some I wouldn't suggest for my teacher candidates. *TEACHING Exceptional Children* published our report titled "Review of Crisis Intervention Training Programs" in 2010. We plan to draft another one in January because there are new companies that have been added.

When I say crisis de-escalation, don't think of it as restraint training. The most important part of these training programs is the actual de-escalation component. It covers the cycle of aggression, and how educators sometimes exacerbate a student's behavior because they don't know how to respond appropriately when a child is going through the cycle of aggression. Every one of us has been mad and has gone through this cycle. First, there was a trigger point or something that agitated you. You went home and accelerated and continued to escalate until you had a peak. This type of outburst could have been a fit or tantrum. It could have been violent or physical aggression. Then you calmed down, de-escalated and went back to the baseline.

JR

How a staff member should respond to a student in the cycle of aggression is based on where the child is in the cycle. If a student comes into my class upset after a trigger, I'm going to respond very differently than if the student was actually in a physical outburst. First, I will try to get the student on task. If he starts to escalate, I'll remind him of the consequences. If the student gets to the point where he's escalating, your goal is no longer to counsel an individual, because he's escalated. Your goal is for the safety of the other students and staff members.

The problem most administrators have is after a fight breaks out and they bring the kids to the office, there's typically a second fight because they haven't de-escalated. Administrators should wait for them to de-escalate to a point where they realize they're in trouble. This is when they will be vulnerable. That's the point where we come up with a game plan, because there is going to be another trigger in the future. We must decide what we are going to do differently next time.

If you start trying to talk to them while they're still de-escalating, you risk sending them off to a second aggression peak cycle. Understanding that cycle of aggression is an entire lecture in itself.

It is so difficult for educators to balance meeting resource and collaboration minutes with trying to observe student behaviors and working with their classroom teachers to come up with plans to solve behavior problems. What suggestions can you offer for making this process easier? What is the most efficient way to track these behaviors?

JR

We're always short of staff. Any school I've ever walked into is overworked and understaffed. So how do we make an observation as simple as possible? The best way to do this is to really teach self-monitoring. Teaching self-management strategies to students and teaching them how to self-monitor so the time spent observing can be focused on double-checking the student's process for self-monitoring.

That's the simplest way. With good self-monitoring skills in the classroom, teachers can go back to teaching whatever it was they were teaching. Teachers don't have to worry about going over to the student. They can momentarily look over to see if the student is on task.

How can a special education teacher write measurable goals that can be documented by the general educator when there is no additional adult support?

If a special educator wants a general educator to monitor a child's behavior, the target behavior needs to be very specific, measurable, and observable. In other words, the special educator needs to spell out exactly what the behavior looks like so the general educator can accurately observe and record any instances of the behavior. It has to be so specific, observable, and measurable that both agreed when it occurred and when it did not occur.

What advice can you provide for collecting data on nonverbal students and how can we determine what is setting off their behavior?

Maureen Conroy is an expert on this. She is the Anita Zucker Professor in Early Childhood Studies at University of Florida. Her expertise is in autism, early childhood, and especially nonverbal students. She's adapted a variation of the Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) specifically for children with autism because their functions differ from the general population. Predominantly, she believes they act either to obtain something, to escape something, or for self-stimulation.

Based on those three functions and the behavior, she sets up scenarios to see when the behavior occurs and doesn't occur. She'll create the same scenario and she'll run different iterations of it. If there's no demand placed on the student and the student still displays the behavior, then she knows it's a self-stimulation type behavior. She'll create the same scenario, but tweak it so there's a highly desirable item such as a teddy bear. If the behavior occurs because the student can't access it, then she determines the function of the behavior is that the student is trying to obtain something. She'll create a situation in which a demand is placed upon the child to see if the behavior occurs. If the behavior stops when she removes the demand, she knows the function of the behavior is escape related.

Do the techniques you described during the webinar work with students of any grade level? What's the earliest grade level when we could start using these data collection methods? Would they work in a pre-K setting?

JR

There is no limit with regard to when educators can use data collection methods. You can use it with any grade. I've consulted with teachers whose students are so young they are transitioning from the sitting to standing stage. This is also when biting is a huge issue. Again, we still have to determine the function of the behavior. Is it because of the ecological environment – does the educator have some children who are able to walk and others who are not? Those who cannot walk may feel like the walking children are violating their personal space and biting may be their only form of defense.

You can record behaviors regardless of the age group. I've worked with teachers from kindergarten to high school and now I'm running a post-secondary program at Clemson. We use it in every grade level imaginable.

Are there behaviors that are culturally-driven and therefore misunderstood as unwanted behaviors? Are they sometimes addressed by trying to change the student?

JR

That's a great question. This is a huge issue in the field of emotional disturbances (ED). ED has historically seen an over-identification of African-American males and Hispanic males. If you look at our teacher population, 75 percent are Caucasian females.

Here is one of the rationales for why there's been over-identification. Let's go back to the two different types of behaviors that people display. They're either externalizing or internalizing. Males, especially African American males, typically display more externalizing behaviors. Caucasian females typically display much more internalizing behaviors. There may be this inherent tension and misunderstanding of the different types of cultural behaviors between these two demographics.

Every year, I give case studies on different concepts to my Clemson teacher candidates and one of the case studies I give is a marginal case. It's about a student who may be identified as having ED by some, but not identified by all. After discussing case studies like this all semester, I break them into groups and the one detail I reiterate is the student is an African-American male. Even after discussing it all semester, typically not a single group will broach that question when it comes to eligibility for this student.

It's a huge concern because most of our teachers are internalizing and most of our children that have problem behaviors are externalizing.

How can administrators get buy-in from front-line staff for positive behavior management?

To tell you the truth, this is the easiest question of all to answer – through data collection. When you can show teachers, parents and administrators the changes, it helps. When you can plot data points for how often the maladaptive behavior occurred and how much the recurrence has reduced after specific intervention, you're proving it's effective and I think you'll get everybody on board. Even the most challenging teachers, parents, and administrators will believe the data.

Dr. Joe Ryan is a Professor of Special Education at Clemson University and the founder and Executive Director of Clemson LIFE (Learning is for Everyone), a post-secondary education program for young adults with intellectual disabilities. He has taught students with emotional and behavioral disorders from grades K through 12 across a variety of educational settings, including resource and self-contained classrooms, special day schools, and a residential treatment center. Joe has over 50 publications, and currently serves as the Editor of the journal Beyond Behavior. He frequently consults and speaks at national and international professional conferences, and has been interviewed by Anderson Cooper, CNN, the New York Times, and the Wall Street Journal. He has also given two U.S. Congressional Briefings on behavioral crisis interventions for schools.

I would argue that there are very few appropriate times when a restraint should be used.

Daniel Crimmins
Ph.D, Director of the Center for Leadership in Disability, Georgia State University

Michael Gamel-McCormick
Ph.D, Executive Director, Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD)

Positive Behavior Strategies: The Real Road to School Climate Change: A Dialogue with Dr. Daniel Crimmins and Dr. Michael Gamel-McCormick

The second webinar in our Real School Climate Change: New Approaches For Better Behavior webinar series was led by positive behavior intervention expert Dr. Daniel Crimmins and early intervention specialist Dr. Michael Gamel-McCormick. During "Positive Behavior Strategies: The Real Road to School Climate Change," both experts discussed positive behavior strategies that can help address problem behavior. Below is a summary of the audience Q&A with Dr. Crimmins and Dr. Gamel-McCormick.

Can the strategies you've recommended be used for all age groups?

DC

The short answer is yes, the individualized interventions have strong support for their use with all ages. The PBIS model and the tiered support model are a little bit newer and were first used with elementary students. Now they are also accepted by educators in middle school and high school and we have seen them extend down into preschool and even earlier. There are adaptations of the model for home use and for alternative settings. Some adaptations even work in the adult systems, both in this country and many places around the world. The strategies are based on behavior sciences and are grounded in values that we think are very important.

What are the alternatives to out-of-school suspensions?

There are many alternatives, but let me go back to a principle that Dr. Crimmins alluded to before I offer some specific suggestions. If we're going to create a consequence, it should be linked to the problem behavior. For example, a student destructed property. The alternative consequence rather than an out-of-school suspension might be to have the student help replace the property or contribute to its replacement. We shouldn't be separating consequences so that they have no connection necessarily to the behavior. Other alternatives are certainly in-school suspension, but we want to be careful that it doesn't take the individual out of academic instruction.

One of the real problems with any type of suspension is that it limits the knowledge and skills the student has an opportunity to gain. To make sure the student is learning from their consequences, districts are starting to provide additional courses after school or on weekends that focus on the student's behavior. This mini-course concept has become popular in a number of districts around the country because the student actually begins to look at his or her own behavior and try to self-identify some triggers to recognize when something is escalating towards a behavior that is inappropriate.

Community service outside of school time and creating behavioral contracts with a student can be a substitute. There are many different strategies that can be used as alternatives to suspension.

For those of our audience members who may not be familiar with mini-courses or may not have used them extensively in this context, can you suggest some individual mini-courses or resources to help them find mini-courses that might be helpful in their own context?

Reece Peterson from the University of Nebraska in Lincoln has done some real nice work in this area.

Obviously prevention is the key to success, but in those moments when a student becomes aggressive and dangerous, how do we keep students and adults safe and deescalate without restraints?

That's a great question, and I appreciate the fact that the questioner put the prevention, and appreciation for prevention, at the top of the question.

We can't be naïve in this, so we acknowledge we need crisis plans. We need people who are really skilled at de-escalation in all settings. There are training approaches that schools can use to help their personnel learn these skills. Also, every student is different. Some students, when they become aggressive and dangerous, need to be brought to a separate place and assisted in calming down. And other students must be left in place while peers move to another place, for safety. Creating a plan for this and then executing it in the middle of a crisis is hard.

If there is any chance that physical restraint will be used, staff must be trained on how to do this safely and then be made aware of the different considerations in the event of physical restraint. For example, the physical restraint should be as brief as possible. Also, both federal-level and most state-level legislations designate that parents be informed when restraint procedures are used, so everyone is on the same page.

I don't have exact data on this, but ironically, I have found that schools that have truly committed to training their staff on proper restraint have actually seen fewer restraints. I think this is attributed to the educators' confidence and understanding that there are alternative techniques to de-escalating a student.

I also suggest that the faculty involved in the de-escalation of a student debrief once the student has calmed. Ask what it took to work through it and analyze what happened. Ask what could be done differently and what could be done to make things run more smoothly. The information that comes from these debriefs is important because it helps create prevention plans. It's really important for us to try to anticipate and use that information for prevention tactics.

MGM

I think Dr. Crimmins' points are exactly right. I really want to emphasize the last two points that he made – debriefing and then prevention planning are critical. When there's an emergency, the first thought is to defuse the situation. The absolute next step should be discussing how a similar event can be prevented in the future. What policies and procedures can we put in place? Then you can go back to your functional behavioral analysis and behavior plans, tweak them, and get really good feedback.

After the incident is over, how do you recommend communicating to the children who were in the classroom about what they saw and experienced?

DC

This is one of those times that I think the truth works pretty well. You can say something like, "Clearly, students, we saw that little Johnny was having a really hard time today. Thank you for cooperating with us. Be assured that we're working with little Johnny to help him better control his behavior, and we're all in this together. He needs your support. Please give it."

How do we get buy-in from staff and reluctant teachers, counselors, and administrators for positive behavior strategies?

MGM

This is about systems change and organizational change. As Dr. Crimmins said during his presentation, it's a very complex process. Individuals in an organization do not always change in the same way. I would actually recommend a multi-pronged approached.

The first prong is to get people information. The U.S. Department of Education funds PBIS.org, which includes a ton of information about the prevention components and what a school can expect to see after implementing a school-wide positive behavioral approach. For those individuals who value data, PBIS.org has it. The evidence of its effectiveness in terms of reduction of certain types of behaviors, the increases in academic accomplishments, the general tenor and the overall feel of the school is all there. There is also a lot of good documentation for each positive behavior strategy approach.

MGM

Secondly, I recommend reiterating to staff that these positive behavior strategies are not just for students with challenging behaviors – it's about creating an academic environment where everybody can succeed. That's one of the real benefits of a school-wide approach. It's not only about students in special education or students with specific challenging behaviors — it's really a benefit for everybody, including the staff and the families. There will be cases in which you need to do a one-on-one discussion with certain people who have been through multiple initiatives in schools. However, this is not an unusual occurrence. The good thing is that if you look at what Dr. Crimmins was saying about 22,000 schools in the country implementing this, or more, you've got real clear data that says this is a recommended practice. This is an effective practice, overall.

Lastly, I suggest building a top-down system for buy-in. I have not been to a school using positive behavior strategies that was able to implement the initiative from the ground up. Administrators really need to buy into this. As you're beginning to put this together, it needs the support of building administration. It needs the support of district administration to be able to work.

DC

I think that's great. I would add just a couple of things to that, Dr. Gamel-McCormick.

One of them is that, in the world of implementation research and this idea of going to scale, there is a dedicated stage that is called exploration in which I would really want teachers talking to teachers, parents talking to parents, administrators talking to administrators, and if possible, students talking to students. This will help a school considering the implementation of positive behavior strategies to say, "What is in it for me? How will my life be better? How will we be more effective in working together? How do we create a win-win-win situation for all involved?"

We get cynical sometimes saying that new curricula will come and go. However, we don't want folks saying, "Oh, positive behavior strategies are just the latest fad." People should study it and understand it. It is in everyone's best interest to improve school culture.

MGM

Dr. Crimmins, I want to add one more component. The one buy-in tool that has been very effective for the implementation of positive behavior strategies is to have a coach that teachers and administrators can go to when there's an unseen glitch or bump that happens. This coach could be from another district or an outside expert. This coach or expert can help individual classroom teachers or administrators work through the challenges that eventually pop up when positive behavior strategies are implemented.

Here's another tactical question. Dr. Crimmins, can you please tackle this one? What types of questions should we be asking ourselves at team meetings and IEP meetings when discussing students who have multiple disciplinary issues?

DC

That's an interesting framing of the question. I think I'm going to answer in a way that many may not predict. People will assume that I will say, "What are questions associated with the functional behavioral assessment?" However, I would actually back up and ask, "Who in this room is here for this student and is really committed to their success?" I'm sometimes concerned that when we start planning, we find out halfway through the meeting that no one likes this student very much. However, in order for the planning to be successful, someone has to care about this student in the planning room. Someone really has to be connected and want this student to succeed.

Once we determine that, we have plenty of resources to refer to for questions regarding a student with multiple disciplinary issues. There is plenty of literature, books and questionnaires to go through when planning for these students. These resources will help us determine if there are one or more behavioral functions we should be addressing in our educational efforts.

Dr. Gamel-McCormick, can you give us some examples of when the use of restraint is appropriate and when it is not?

I would argue that there are very few appropriate times when a restraint should be used. It would be an emergency situation. When there is imminent danger to a student, to another classmate or to a staff member. Beyond that, there really is not an appropriate time. By imminent danger I mean someone will quickly be physically harmed if the student is not restrained. That would be the only case in which I would see restraint as being used. Then we need a quick transition to a "cooling-down" period to make sure that either a staff member or another trusted adult can help de-escalate the behavior quickly and help the student get to a point where he or she is feeling more positive and more in-control.

We have to remember that when a student reaches this point of frustration, it is very unpleasant for them, as well. We also have to remember that this behavior is a risk to not just the staff and other students, but to the student acting out, as well. It's essentially a form of trauma. We need to make sure that we're beginning to turn around that experience as quickly as possible.

Dr. Daniel Crimmins is professor and director for the Georgia State University Center for Leadership in Disability. He is an authority on restraint and seclusion and on the use of positive and preventative supports in schools. Dan has been working in this field for many years and played a key role in Georgia's adoption of regulations on the use of restraint and seclusion. He has been at the forefront of bringing new and emerging practices into everyday use. His work with Mark Durand on the Motivation Assessment Scale was among the first efforts to quickly assess the functions of challenging behaviors. The book he co-authored, Positive Strategies for Students with Behavior Problems is a groundbreaking guide to developing positive behavior support plans with effective solutions for educators from grades K through 12.

Dr. Michael Gamel-McCormick has spent decades studying and working on issues affecting students with disabilities in schools, and has done much work around restraint and seclusion in schools, and numerous other educational issues. Since 2014 he has been the Associate Executive Director at the Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD). Prior to his current position, he was the disability policy director with the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions under the chairmanship of Senator Tom Harkin and Dean of the College of Education and Public Policy at the University of Delaware. Michael is also co-author of the popular book Young Children with Special Needs: A Developmentally Appropriate Approach.

We believe that an emotional regulation approach, in the long term, really helps a student in such a way that they do not have to engage in problematic behavior if they're well regulated and if they're supported appropriately.

Social Communication + Emotional Regulation: An Environment for School Success: A Dialogue with Dr. Barry Prizant and Amy Laurent

The final webinar in the Real School Climate Change: New Approaches For Better Behavior webinar series was led by Dr. Barry Prizant and his colleagues Emily Rubin, MS, CCC-SLP, and Amy Laurent, Ed.M, OTR/L. Their webinar "Social Communication + Emotional Regulation: An Environment for School Success" provided an overview of the SCERTS® Model and detailed strategies for preventing problem behavior. Afterward, we sat down with Barry Prizant and Amy Laurent to discuss questions submitted by audience members.

Barry M. Prizant
Ph.D., Childhood Communication Services & Adjunct Professor, Brown University

Amy Laurent
Ed.M, OTR/L

Barry, the first question is for you. How is it possible to focus on social communication and emotional regulation with all the pressure for teachers to focus on academic performance?

BP

That's a great question. One of the things that we really believe about the SCERTS Model is it provides the framework to support children in all activities. We don't see this as a dichotomy in terms of focusing on social communication and emotional regulation versus academic performance. We see success in social communication and emotional regulation being a very important component of success in academics. As the famous Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky said, most learning — 70% to 80% — occurs in the social context, which requires effectiveness in social communication.

Amy, do you want to take this next one? How is SCERTS different from approaches that rely on behavior management strategies?

So as we introduced in the section of the webinar talking about emotional regulation, emotional regulation is really focused on helping students acquire developmental capacity. Strategies that they have themselves, or how they're able to access other people to regulate their own emotions and their arousal levels: to delay transitions, to delay gratification, to tolerate transitions, those types of things. And that's really a different approach than a traditional behavior approach, which really focuses on control and compliance and often consequences. Those approaches rely on external factors — there are other people to be in control. And the emotional regulation approach is really about developing capacity within the students themselves.

Barry, here's another one for you. How do you convince colleagues that focusing on emotional regulation is not simply letting students get away with "bad behavior" without strict consequences?

Well, it's very interesting that, in our school consulting, very often we get this question. As a matter of fact, I was working with a behavioral consultant who really came to embrace an emotional regulation strategy and supporting students. She said, "But my colleagues are saying we're just letting them get away with crime." We believe that an emotional regulation approach, in the long term, really helps a student in such a way that they do not have to engage in problematic behavior if they're well-regulated and if they're supported appropriately. I think this is also an appropriate time to mention that SCERTS is not just about supporting students with autism. It's about supporting students who have challenges, especially in social communication and emotional regulation. Many mental health professionals who don't deal exclusively or even predominantly with students with autism are now finding the SCERTS Model effective.

Emotional regulation comes out of decades of research on the development of the capacity to be most engaged, to be able to be available for learning and engaging. So there's a strong research base that says if we can help students with the appropriate supports to do this independently, as Amy just mentioned, then we don't have to rely upon external control and consequences. As a matter of fact, we're learning more and more that trying to control student behavior primarily based upon consequences is not an effective approach, and Dan Crimmins had mentioned that in the previous webinar to ours.

Amy, are the SCERTS strategies easily applied in a regular classroom setting? For an example, can transactional support strategies be utilized in general education environment with 24 kids?

Absolutely. So in the video example that you all just watched in the webinar, the young boy was involved in a regular education classroom as an inclusive setting. You can see that the teacher was able to implement the support, really with that particular student in mind, but also that the class benefitted as a whole in terms of the class's ability to actively engage and connect and communicate with one another, and to fill their roles in the different activities. The goal of SCERTS is being able to put these supports into place and embed them in naturally-occurring routines for students or naturally-occurring activities to increase their active engagement and their ability to learn. What we often find is that it benefits everybody in the class as well.

Do you feel that it's better to implement the SCERTS program in a few classes before introducing to the entire school to gauge success within the population?

Well, I think the answer really depends upon where the school is currently. Some schools and agencies we've consulted came to us saying they've read about SCERTS or they've gone to some trainings and they really want to embrace SCERTS. In those cases, it can be introduced to the whole school if the school is looking at changing their current way of doing business, if you will. In other situations, we have professionals — maybe an SLP or an OT or a special educator or an educator — who have read about SCERTS and been exposed to SCERTS. They don't necessarily have everybody on board, or they have some good questions coming from other staff members about SCERTS, and in that case we sometimes recommend having some pilot classrooms where we could really engage the staff, train the staff well, and have them implement the SCERTS Model to help other people in the school or in the agency understand what SCERTS is about. So in a sense it's a top-down versus bottom-up approach. A top-down approach would be exposing the whole agency or school to SCERTS and all of the staff simultaneously as opposed to a bottom-up approach.

We also talk about predictors for success of SCERTS being implemented in a school setting. So that has to do with the current training philosophy and experience of the staff. So, for example, a school that already has a good team-based model would be much more likely to be successful with SCERTS for a schoolwide approach. When folks in the school are very developmentally trained, that would be another example of SCERTS being successful. If a school program already uses multimodal teaching and a lot of visual supports in all of their classrooms, then that would be a very strong, positive predictor of SCERTS being implemented. The answer to the question really is, and this is very much SCERTS philosophy, when we work with families, we want to be able to approach the families where they are. When we work with students and staff, we want to approach them with where they're at developmentally. So when we work with a whole school or agency, we want to approach them where they're at and provide the appropriate support to enable them to adopt and implement SCERTS.

Amy, I'm wondering if you can tell us how to measure progress in social communication and emotional regulation?

Sure thing. When we talked about the overview of social communication and emotional regulation, I introduced a concept of a curriculum within the SCERTS Model, and that curriculum we use is an assessment — it's a scope and sequence of goals and objectives, really. That scope and sequence of goals and objectives is used to select objectives that can be embedded directly into a child's IFSP or IEP and monitored on a regular basis. We can look for progress in that traditional monitoring that we tend to use in the school environment. One of the things that's really important to mention when we talk about progress in social communication and emotional regulation, is that we're really looking for a child to be able to demonstrate their skills or abilities in those areas in a variety of different contexts with a variety of different people. It's not just can a child or a student do something in an activity or in a therapy session, but can they demonstrate a greater ability to initiate interaction with people out on the playground, within the context of the cafeteria, and in the classroom as well. That's going to extend to the home environment. We really think across contexts — to the home, school, and community.

We talk about this as authentic progress — progress that really has meaning because it contributes to the individual's quality of life and shows that they have gained developmental capacity that they're able to use across different activities and environments. One of the other things to talk about in terms of progress, as well as social communication and emotional regulation, is how we measure that programmatically. Within the context of the SCERTS program and the SCERTS manuals, there are forms called the SCERTS quality indicators. These forms can be used in a school or in a classroom to demonstrate how staff is moving forward with supporting kids, in terms of their acquisition of greater communication and regulatory skills. We think about it from a variety of different perspectives, both for the individual student, as well as the classroom, but we're always thinking about it within the context of where the child or the student needs to function.

Barry, how do you involve families? How do you help parents understand SCERTS?

SCERTS is a very family-centered model and again, we like to say that we truly walk the walk, we don't just talk the talk. Built into the SCERTS assessment process, we get detailed information from parents through questionnaires and interviews. And they actually can be involved in the assessment process by helping us understand their child's challenges and their child's strengths across many different settings. We really try to connect with families at their level, so under the transactional support domain, we have components that we refer to as educational support and emotional support for families. We actually build into a plan how we are supporting parents and families, educationally and emotionally. If you want to get a better sense of this, one of the previous webinars I did for PresenceLearning was on family professional collaboration, and much of what I spoke about in that webinar certainly was greatly influenced by our practices in the SCERTS Model.

Amy, SCERTS seems very detailed and comprehensive. How do you suggest that a school moves into adopting SCERTS?

AL

A school really needs to think about where they are in terms of some of those indicators that Barry mentioned that are prognostic for success. Identify where you are currently functioning with the administrator support, the team approach, and the family-centeredness. This will help you identify whether your school is ready for a more top-down approach, where you think globally about what things really help propel SCERTS forward and are consistent with SCERTS practice and try to do that across the school. It will also help you identify if you need a really detailed bottom-up approach instead, where the school looks at an individual child or an individual classroom and tries to do SCERTS assessment processes and move forward. There are lots of different ways to think about moving forward. You can also take a look at our resource list for more resources and ideas about how to move forward with adopting SCERTS.

What type of training is needed for SCERTS to be implemented by a school-based team?

BP

One of the things that we like to emphasize is that moving into SCERTS is a process. In terms of the type of training, as I alluded to earlier, it really depends upon what that team comes to us with and what they bring to SCERTS. For example, being a team-based approach, SCERTS is always much more successfully implemented when there is input and true collaboration amongst speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, school psychologists, special educators, regular educators, and certainly with that support from the administration. We do introductory and advanced trainings live on the SCERTS Model and on the resource list, you will see the websites of the SCERTS collaborators that you can check to see where training is being provided. One of the things that we're hoping will happen in the future is the possibility of more in-depth web-based training, beyond the very brief introductory level that we spoke about today. Right now, there's a great demand for information on SCERTS. We certainly have a number of publications that are available on scerts.com as well as on our individual websites that can be downloaded. Stay tuned for more information about ways for school-based teams and professionals to be trained in the SCERTS Model.

Barry and Amy, can you share your thoughts on general education teachers? Specifically, we're wondering how easily these strategies can be taught to and implemented by a general education teacher within a mainstream classroom.

AL

That's a great question. I think, again, if we think about the video example that we used as part of this presentation it gives us some information as to how a regular education teacher is able to embed some of these strategies in a regular education environment. I'd also like to mention that there's lots of ongoing research regarding SCERTS, and particularly our colleague Amy Wetherby, who is at Florida State University, is spearheading a project called Classroom SCERTS Intervention. That intervention study was a four-year grant that looked at the implementation of SCERTS within regular and special education environments, but this was really about training regular education teachers to implement the SCERTS framework within their classrooms. It's a little too early to talk about the results, but they'll be coming out soon and Amy's rather excited about them. It's something that we've been able to demonstrate both within all of our consulting practices and our individual work with individual teachers and students as well as through the education that we've done. Now it looks as if we'll have some good research to back up that regular education teachers are able to take these strategies and infuse them in their classrooms with fair ease and good results as well.

Barry, is there anything you want to add to that before we close?

BP

Well, I'd just like to add, especially because some of the previous webinars in this series presented within a positive behavioral support model, and that is SCERTS has been adopted in schools that have already been trained in PBS or PBIS. The feedback we get is that PBIS helps to set the general set of values that will guide the school and certainly helps the school administration communicate back to all of the teachers. And SCERTS does that as well, but SCERTS gets down to specific individual and individualized strategies for individual students. As we've said over and over again, this is not just about students with autism — it's about students who have challenges in other developmental capacities, especially social communication and emotional regulation. It's also about setting the appropriate school climate that supports all students in their learning and regulation.

Dr. Barry Prizant is a frequent presenter with the PresenceLearning SPED Ahead webinar program, and an expert on behavior therapy and approaches. He has, for over 25 years, been on the front lines helping educators understand how to compassionately help children succeed in school and beyond. He is one of the world's leading authorities for advising families. In August, 2015 by Simon & Schuster released his book Uniquely Human: A Different Way of Seeing Autism. The book has received critical acclaim and has propelled Barry into the limelight with dozens of interviews on TV, radio and in publications.

Amy Laurent is a pediatric occupational therapist with a Master's degree from Boston University in Special Education and co-author of the SCERTS Model. She has a private practice specializing in the education of children with autism spectrum disorders and related developmental disabilities. Amy provides educational services to clients and she is a consultant to those who lead educational programs that serve individuals with ASD. Like her colleagues Dr. Barry Prizant and Emily Rubin, she lectures and provides training throughout the United States and internationally on the SCERTS Model and other topics related to therapeutic and educational interventions for children with Autism.