





Reaching the Hard-to-Reach Student



By Maria Sargent

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INTRODUCTION

What are Value Codes?



Students come to us with very different belief systems. These beliefs motivate both the students' behavior as well as their interest in academics. They will respond to items they consider important and ignore those that have no meaning to them.

As professionals, we have our own belief

systems that motivate us as well. We see certain skills and attitudes as being worthwhile and others as being destructive. Unfortunately, what we see as being important and what the students (and for that matter, families) see as important may be two different things!

In this unit we will quickly explore the four value codes and learn how to shift between them in order to increase student motivation and cooperation. We will then look at specific ways to use this information to enhance classroom learning and deal with behavior problems.

We will finish the unit by applying the same principles to work with families in order to increase their willingness to become involved in school functions and their child's education and behavior support.

The Value Code Continuum

Value codes are rather interesting to look at. The continuum of value codes is not based on which "is better" but rather the strength of the code itself. The top code, Religious and Spiritual Code, is unusually strong and stable over time. The lowest code, Personal Code, tends to fluctuate, especially in difficult situations or over time. Let's explore each of the four value codes in order of strength, strongest/most stable to the weakest.

Religious/Spiritual Code



People operating at this code level are guided in their behavior decisions by the spiritual or religious code they embrace. Many people might feel they operate at this code level, but if they deviate from their religion significantly (i.e. they disagree with basic beliefs of their religion and refuse to follow them) then they really are operating at personal code instead. It just so happens that their personal code includes some religious and spiritual concepts.

To really be at this code level, the person must basically "give the decision making concerning behavior to their religious beliefs". Realize that this is not a thoughtless or robotic response. It is a commitment to something that many people have analyzed and found worthy of their belief. They will see things are right/wrong or good/evil based on their religious perspective and will also use this code to guide daily activities, often seeing them as part of their duty or vocation.

Family/Traditional Code

People operating at the Family/Traditional Code will determine what they should do based on "what has always been done" and/or the actions of their parents and grandparents. They will observe these

models and mimic them in their daily life. In many countries traditions and religious rules may overlap to a degree. Usually, though, one of the code levels will have a greater strength. The behaviors may be the same but the rational will vary.

For example, children may be taught to show respect to adults in both codes, but at the religious code level the reason behind the behavior is a religious rule (i.e. 10 commandments, etc.) and at the family code level the children are taught that you "should respect your elders" as a tradition or family rule. Same behavior----different rationale.



Legal/Civic Code

People using the Legal/Civic Code will make decisions based on how that behavior will be viewed by different levels of society. This may include legal codes that are determined by the legal system and in other cases it will involve less formal systems, including school, classroom or club rules.

Civic code varies a great deal because so many different cities, school districts and community organizations are involved. This leads to conflicts where the person may have to drop down to personal code and make a choice about which code to follow (i.e. a college student at Civic Code knows it is illegal to vandalize but may make a personal decision to go ahead and do it in order to gain entry to a club).



The drop to civic code can be a large one and sometimes difficult for teachers who are basing their decisions on religious/spiritual or family/traditional beliefs. Using our previous example, we mentioned that a student might be taught to be respectful to teachers due to religious beliefs, others due to family traditional beliefs.

Students at civic code, though, make their decisions based on the rules around them. In many schools there are rules against physically assaulting teachers <u>but there may not be specific rules about</u> <u>respecting them</u> since it is so difficult to measure in an objective manner. So, these students may follow the "letter of the law" and not touch teachers or call them certain names, but true respect in terms of attitude may not necessarily be shown. A fine distinction but an important one!

Personal Code

People using Personal code personally determine which behaviors and actions they will use. They will pick up and drop behaviors and beliefs based on their perception at that moment, so this code level may be very fluid. Decisions based on this code level will not necessarily follow logic or remain consistent over time since the perception may change rapidly. People using personal code often will embrace many behaviors and beliefs



typically seen as religious, traditional or civic-based. The difference is THEY pick and choose which ones to follow. Their perception is the ultimate authority when these decisions have to be made.

Value Code Shifting---THE Critical Skill

Now that we examined the Value Code Continuum, it is clear that children come to us with very different value codes. Each teacher will also have a code preference that will influence their interactions with children and the way they view misbehavior.

In addition, each school has a code level as well. Parochial schools are obviously at Religious Code; some isolated public schools may be as well, even though this is not the norm any longer. Most public schools fall in the Traditional Code to the Civic Code range, with the more urban schools usually towards the Civic end due to the increased diversity. Lastly, some schools promote Personal Codes and believe that "children should form their own values without adult interference". They are fewer in number but do exist.



Teachers should realize how the code level of their school affects their stress level. If there is a big difference between codes, some stress will be felt. So, a religious code teacher may worry that certain behaviors are being ignored in a civic code school, and a personal code teacher may worry that a religious code school is too strict or lax.

So, how can any teacher manage this maze of belief systems and survive? The key technique is to *Value Code Shift*. This will allow you to unify the various codes in your room and motivate children to learn skills that may not be considered important in their current value system. <u>Value code shifting is probably the most critical technique that can be used</u> to encourage children to change behavior patterns and learn difficult academic skills.

In order to use value code shifting well, you really have to get to know your students. You have to figure out their dreams, beliefs and motivations so you can use them. In addition, you will need to put some time and thought into how to weave these into the lessons or behavior supports that the student needs to succeed. It is not an easy path to follow, but I have found that it allows me to capture the cooperation of even the most difficult student, regardless of age. That does not mean you will capture everyone, but it definitely will increase your success rate.



In most cases, <u>you will need to drop down to the student's personal code</u>. Since this code level is now so common, I have just gone ahead and brought all my teaching and behavior support down to the level. It works in any setting and with any family and child, so is probably the best way for most teachers to operate. The basic technique on how to shift to this personal code can be found on the next page and all other applications will follow.

Working at the Personal Code



The key to value code shifting down to the personal code level is to determine which career or skill the student is very interested in and use that as the motivation for the lesson or program. You really can use just about any concept and make it work with a little twisting.

For example, when I worked with a little one what wanted to be a race car driver, I related his program on "staying in his seat" back to that interest. I

showed him that race cars are very small inside so the instruments could be bumped easily. This served as the basis of his behavior program and he worked hard to learn the skill not because it was right or wrong (religious code), the way we should act in school (traditional code), or the classroom rules (civic code). He learned it at his personal code level--- "getting ready to be a race car driver" ^(C)

So, a group of children that are having difficulty learning to keep a quiet body might be working on the skill for different personal reasons as follows:

Football:	Have to stay still at line of scrimmage or you will be declared "off-sides"
Basketball:	Have to stay still until jump ball or free throw is completed to avoid penalties
Modeling:	Have to stay still or the pictures will be blurry
Science:	Have to wait until the exact right moment to mix chemicals, etc.
Dance:	Have to stay still until the correct count for your part
Surgery:	Have to control body, not scratch nose 😊, etc. while in surgery

We will start exploring how this simple concept can be used. We will start with classroom applications, move on to behavior programs and finish with some ideas that can be used with families.

CLASSROOM SUPPORT

Early Childhood Classrooms

Any academic skill will make more sense if related back to a young child's own experience. We attempt to do this with most skills on a daily basis because we understand the nature of early childhood teaching. But, we can take this concept one step further by exploring how to help individual students who are struggling due to lack motivation or repeated failure. Here are two examples to get you started thinking this way... Visual cues for both can be found in the Early Childhood Appendix (page 33).

Unable to Understand Addition

make a crash report.

A student could not understand the concept of addition. He could not remember the sign for the operation nor what he should do. Since he had failed at this for almost two years, he had no motivation to continue. His personal code involved a strong fascination with cars and policemen.

He was taught that the "+" sign resembled a four-way stop for cars.



When cars come to that four-way stop and do not obey the stop signs, they crash into a pile in the center of the intersection. They then have to call the police to



Addition is seeing how many cars were involved so the police can make an accurate report on the crash. The numbers on each side of the "+" sign would tell him how many cars were on each side and the "=" (looks like a road) would tell him how many crashed at that part of the road.



This worked like a charm. The personal code of loving cars helped the visual cues make sense, and the chance to work with miniature cars and "make police reports" gave him the motivation to continue with the lessons. The need for the skill now had personal meaning to him. He had to learn if he was ever going to be able to become a police officer and make "good crash reports" ⁽³⁾

Inability to Read Clock Hands

A student with a developmental delay had still not mastered learning to read the hands of a clock. He had worked on this skill since first grade. He was embarrassed and refused to work on the skill. Because of his delay, he felt strongly about being seen as "big". Since he was often behind other students his age, he spoke mostly about being "bigger than his little sister" who was in kindergarten. To begin, the hands were cued with the big hand being him and the little hand being his little sister...



The difference between the two hands was then explained in this manner.



The child learned the skill after only one lesson! It will not always go this quickly, but anytime you bring the skill down to the child's personal code, you are more likely to have success. Let's move on to some examples for children in upper elementary.

Middle Childhood Classrooms

As children get older, value code shifting becomes a bit easier. Most topics can be easily embedded in general activities for the total classroom and the connection can often just be pointed out verbally. Here is one simple and two more involved activities to get you started.

Refusal to Work on Word Dictionary

A student disliked completing his word dictionary, a task that was done weekly. The teacher made a point of explaining how the words would be used by many different professions, including an architect, the profession of most interest to this student. This helped a great deal. He did not like the task any better, but he began to write the words without protest.

Refusal to Learn Fractions after Repeated Failure

A student did not seem to understand fractions despite many hands-on activities and was refusing to complete activities associated with them. She just did not seem to be able to visualize the part-to-whole aspect of them. The student loved her mother a great deal so the teacher devised an activity that all the students could complete. The students first cut apart circles showing various fractions and then glued them to a center circle and then the whole "flower" to a stem.





All the students were eager to complete the activity and the child who hated fractions joined right in since she knew the "art project" was for her mother.

Once all the children had constructed flowers of different fractions, the teacher talked with the children about which flowers they liked best and why. The child in question began to understand that the "1/6" flower she liked better had six petals and each petal was smaller than the other flowers with 1/3, 1/4, etc.---the first time she had shown this recognition.

The teacher then taught a quick lesson on flower arranging and had the children arrange their flowers in a vase with a bow. They then were able to take their "Fraction Flower Bouquet" home as a present for someone in their life.

Dislike of Roman Numerals

A student was having difficulty understanding the concept of Roman Numerals. The student already did not care for math and the added burden of dealing with numbers in a different form was just asking too much as far as he was concerned! The student loved video games and anything to do with knights, castles and other historical concepts. The teacher decided to develop a unit on the Middle Ages. There were students who needed some extra work on writing, some with fine motor issues and this young man who was struggling with Roman Numerals. The teacher guided the students into "guilds" that would target their needs. The students with writing issues were creating manuscripts, the ones with fine motor were working on calligraphy, and the student who needed work on Roman Numerals documented serf output for the king. Since this report had to mirror the math of the period, it was done in Roman Numerals.

The unit eventually took on a life of its own with students learning to weave, card wool preserve food with salt and many other related tasks. A simple wonderful unit with children working extra hard to complete daily work so they could move on to their "free time" work in the Middle Ages ③



Classrooms for Older Students

As you move into the older age group, the task of integrating this type of need becomes more specialized and time intensive. Because of this, you will probably be somewhat limited in what you can do within the regular curriculum. Try to link content at least verbally (i.e. explaining quickly how different professions use the material they are learning).

If you are working with a special population, though, you will have the ability to do this at a more intense level. Many of these students have experienced repeated failure, so having the chance to learn and excel will drive them forward, especially if it targets an interest. A little success goes a long way!

Failure to Learn Percentages and a Dislike of Writing

At times it is possible to weave to concepts together. In this case, a student really disliked percentages. They did not make sense to the student, and he had no desire to learn the content. In addition, he disliked writing, though there really was no academic weakness associated with the skill. The teacher decided to begin a school newspaper that would be put out through the internet. He figured it would target many skills his group of students needed both academically and behaviorally. The student mentioned here was put in charge of generating and reporting baseball stats, a sport he played and loved as well a baseball trivia column. Worked very well...so well it continued for the rest of the year!





Inability to Write a Paragraph

A student had great difficulty writing. He also had areas of exceptional ability, especially in math. The teacher decided to back the student back down to the most basic form of writing (i.e. sentence construction) and associate each form with a number.



The teacher then devised a game (the student was very competitive) where he and the other students would write essays on a favorite topic using random dice rolls. Whatever dice roll they got, they had to come up with a sentence of that form that would fit into their article. If they were successful, they received points. It made the task of writing more interesting, and had enough of a "math" twist that the student described here enjoyed the task.



As it turned out, learning each sentence form in isolation really helped the student and solved the problem. Once he seemed to understand those forms, writing, while still not well liked, became less of an issue!

Professional-in-Residence (Whole School)

Many children need some assistance in understanding exactly how academic work fits into their life plans. This can especially be needed if the student has had little experience with adults who are gainfully employed. Here is a technique that can quite useful...

Professional-in-Residence

This is best run as a school-wide activity. The concept is fairly simple. Just have a professional "move in" to the school and run their business from that location for a week or two. Some schools will have them present all the time but most only certain days or times (i.e. during lunch). There are sometimes restrictions on what can be done in this space, so there have been times that certain professions were restricted to demonstrations and/or "fake" work. In most cases, though, the professionals are more than willing to do their "work" in that setting, even if all they do is show some simple pieces of it (i.e. a doctor just having x-rays up and having children learn to take their own pulse and listen to their own heartbeat).

The teachers should connect academics to the experience. Show how that profession uses the math, reading, spelling skills, etc. that the children are covering as well as "professional behaviors" they must show (i.e. completing work on time, language usage, etc.). Make sure to also explore less typical careers----singers, dancers, video game programmers, people who



make artificial limbs, chefs, etc. Having the children suggest vocations is a wonderful way to go!

BEHAVIOR SUPPORT

Pragmatics of Behavior

Most people are familiar with the concept of "pragmatics" in terms of language. We speak differently to our friends than we do our employers, etc. We have the ability to switch our language registers.

In Pragmatics of Behavior, we are assisting children to do the same thing. This is necessary because many of our children are operating on very different behavior registers at home! We cannot compete with this learning, and in some cases should not since the value code the child is operating from is religious



in nature. What we CAN do, though, is <u>set our school and classroom as a different behavior register</u> <u>and require the children to switch to that register when they arrive at school</u>. Here are some things to keep in mind as you begin to use this concept of pragmatics of behavior at school.

Neurological Code Level

Some children will be able to switch registers at the auditory code level. They hear the announcements and morning greetings and automatically switch to "school behavior". Other children, though, will need something more visual or physical. These children really need to move their picture from the "home board" to the "school board", sign in or do some other type of entry activity. In some cases having that entry activity involve a review of school rules can be useful.

Concern about Confusion

If we have children switch registers, will this cause confusion? No, in most cases if the switch is well defined with visual and physical cues, the children will be fine. Just look at how easily children switch between "grandparent-house behavior" and home ^(C) Most will figure it out easily!

Use Outside of School

Please note that this approach can be useful when a child's behavior is inappropriately changing after being in another setting (i.e. shared custody, caregivers, etc.). Same concept---different application...

Use for Behavioral Situations

Putting the two concepts together (Value Code Shifting and Pragmatics of Behavior) can strengthen behavior programs and increase their success. We simply hook the behavior to something the child finds "valuable" and then systematically teach the behavior they are missing in the school setting. Let's review the value code levels quickly using this example of hitting someone:

6	Spiritual Code-	It is wrong to hit someone
	Traditional Code-	We are not allowed to hit people
	Civic/LegalCode-	It is against the rules/law to hit people
	Personal Code-	I can't hit people because

Once we know the code level we need...usually personal...we can then begin to construct the plan and systematically teach a behavior that the child will use in school. Even if they do not use it at home, we can get some level of success if the new behavior register (i.e. school) is well defined and the behavior strongly reinforced. It would be lovely if we could always get the behavior in all locations, but if this is all we can do, at least we can show the child "another way to act" when they are in our care!

Early Childhood Behavior Programs

So, how do we get this all to fit together for this youngest age group? Well, this group if fairly easy because the personal values they have are consistent (i.e. stereotypes like firemen, policemen, sports, etc.). They also love to pretend, so that gives you an edge as well. Here is an example of a program for a little boy who wanted to be a fireman. He needed to learn to follow adult directions. The teacher

tied the program into the need for "firemen to be able to listen to driving directions over the radio and other firemen related concepts.

Since the child involved did not follow directions at home and his parents were not concerned about the behavior, the teacher had the child sign into his "fireman training program" when he arrived at school and put his fireman badge on his shirt. Worked great! His "training contract" can be seen to the right...



At times you may have to "stretch a concept" to get it to fit. Here is a program for a young boy who had an interest in being a football player. The teacher involved successfully worked in the concept by explaining to the child about football players having to sit for coach pep talks, weekly film, television appearances and other situations where he would have to sit still. Definitely a bit of a twist, but it worked [©]





This also shows how value code shifting must be wound together with all the other tools of positive behavior support. This young man had to be <u>taught</u> the behavior systematically over time. The teacher visually cued and reinforced by making "sitting cards". A card was secured to his desk at the beginning of every period, if he made it through without having to be told repeatedly to sit down; he got to put it in his jar. At the end of the day, he could turn them in for various reinforcers. This was a wonderful visual cue during the lesson and a nice positive program with a perfect personal value code. Easy data collection for the teacher too ----a definite winner all the way around!

Middle Childhood Behavior Programs

Middle childhood is a bit trickier because this group rapidly moves from programs that are prominent to ones that are more symbolic and less obvious to peers. You will be the best judge of where the student falls. If you are still able to use a more obvious and visual chart, make sure to make it directly applicable to the student's interest. The generic "I want to be a ballerina" approach will no longer work well...

In addition, you will need to deal with other teachers, very flexible schedules and other random data collection demands. Because of this, these programs are best kept open in terms of time periods and if at all possible, the reinforcers or consequences running through the home, as in the case of this student

below. In this situation, he was learning to follow directions in order to become a "robot engineer". The time periods were open---morning, lunch and afternoon, and the reinforcers and consequences actually set by him and his mother.

If that is not possible, there still are things you can use as in-school reinforcers, but they may be more limited if the student is not always in your room during the day... Do the best you can with the situation you are in. Even a slightly weak program is better than no program at all!



As this age group matures, the programs should transform into contracts with very limited visuals that can call attention to the student. You can come up with small little cues (i.e. symbols on the hand, signs, etc.) that can be used to remind the student of what they are working on, but the actual program sheet itself must be managed quietly and look older. The "ballet goal chart" to the right has the correct tone.





Completing programs can be celebrated with something a bit more colorful, but they still should have the air of an "official document" rather than a picture chart.

Here is an example to consider, but anything that takes into consideration the sensitivity of this age group will work...

Behavior Programs for Older Students

Student that are still working on this goal at this age usually have a host of behavioral issues and/or special placements that complicate issues. If the student is in a more typical setting, it is best to use the Middle School approach with the modifications needed for that student and setting. You will need to tone down the use of any visual or graphics and truly consider how you can work with the student given their schedules of different teachers. Do what you can in the time you have them and do not be afraid to ask other teachers to cooperate in a global approach. If you are having problems, you can usually assume they are as well!

If you have the student in a specialized and/or contained placement, you can do much more. Here are some examples of how to run a combined behavior and academic enhancement program in this type of setting. Here are the first steps to take:

- 1. Determine the student's career goal
- 2. Set up a very interesting project that targets this goal in the classroom
- 3. Allow the student to earn time to work on their "vocational project" by completing academics
- 4. Set up the program so it is clearly understood how time is earned and document the minutes
- 5. If needed, manage the work time earned as a bank account to teach life skills

I have kept whole groups of high school students in programs for emotional and behavioral problems involved in school simply by running this type of program. If they are working towards something they "want to be" and you are constantly relating academics back to it, you will hold them in school, if that is at all possible! Here are some cautions and then examples of ones I have run in the past...

Be Realistic in the Goal

At times you will have a student set a goal that is not attainable. Since these are students nearing the end of their time in school, you must be realistic about their possible futures. This does not mean necessarily dealing with it head-on. Sometimes you can "move" them to something that is related. For example, I had a student with severe behavioral problems who wanted to be a ballet dancer. Unfortunately, she was 5'10" and weighed almost 200 pounds!

So, we started with ballet, but I quickly began adding in other aspects of performing arts---the lights, costumes, music, until finally one clicked! She became interested in specialized makeup after she watched an internet video on how the makeup was done for Shrek. Once she saw that she switched to an interest in being a makeup and hair artist, something that made much more sense for her personal abilities....



Use Resources that are Accessible

Many students do not have access to lessons for voice, music, etc. Fortunately, the internet is a wonderful resource. With that tool you can mimic voice training, create books, learn graphics and a host of other items of interest to this age group. I sincerely do not know how I could manage these programs without it. If you do not have internet access, you can still run these, but the scope is much more limited. I have managed by involving mentors, etc. but if you can get access, even limited access, you will be able to do much more for these students.

Here are some of the programs I have run in the past. They do take time, but they are worth it!

<u>Interest</u> Automotive	Program Learned to be a mechanic using YouTube videos. Went on to vocational program ⁽²⁾
Basketball	Worked on moves and shooting tips. Also introduced him to the Harlem Globetrotters.
Cheerleading	Watched competition videos and started creating chants for elementary school squad.
Computer	Watched any amazing innovation I could find—very cool. We all used to watch them!
Landscaping	Landscaped using visuals I found for himgrids, trees, etc. Loved to make stadiums.
Culinary Arts	Watched cooking videos then created a cookbook online and printed it for family.
Police	Looked at requirements for civil service tests (that got him going on academics) and then also explored unusual police careers (i.e. dog handling, horses mounted, etc.)

Singing Worked through a whole series of voice lessons online. Eventually joined church choir.

Tattoo Artist Worked through a drawing program online and as well as through different books.

I am sure you will think of many more!!!!

APPENDIX

EARLY CHILDHOOD





















Visually cue the "small" hand with a small child, and the "big" hand with a big child.









MIDDLE CHILDHOOD























OLDER Students



