

RESOLVING SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' DISCIPLINARY PROBLEMS THROUGH SCHOOL WIDE POSITIVE BEHAVIOURAL SUPPORTS

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Abstract

Students' disciplinary problems are growing at alarming rate prompting the need for effective strategies for curbing them. When disciplinary problems are not curbed, they affect the teaching/learning process and the general time of the school. Disciplinary problems of students interfere with learning, divert administrative time, and contribute to teacher burn out. Schools often respond to disruptive students with exclusionary and punitive approaches that have limited value. This paper focused on school wide positive behavioural support approach for improving school disciplinary practices and students behaviour. The article examined its epistemological and empirical roots and supporting research, suggesting ways to the effectiveness of the approach.

Indiscipline is ranked a major problem among secondary school students in Nigeria. Schools face a number of challenges related to disruptive and anti social students' behaviour. The behaviour of these students interferes with learning. Disruptive behaviour is a concern to schools, parents and fellow students whose education may be adversely affected. Discipline is of crucial relevance to all that the school has to offer students including meaningful teaching/learning, satisfactory school climate and effective school management as precursor of success in all school curricular and co- curricular activities (Simatwa, 2012 & Kamandi, 2011). However, indiscipline is very common among secondary school students in Nigeria (Nakpodia, 2010).

Concept of Discipline

Success does not just happen ordinarily. Individuals want to get somewhere in life and in business. The one common theme that does come up when conversing with successful people is discipline. Whether it is a business person growing an organization or an athlete wanting to medal in competition, discipline is the one element they all have in common. Discipline is a fundamental element in obtaining goals, dreams and desire and very important school factor. Discipline has been described in various forms. Discipline is the display of behavior that is socially agreed upon as appropriate at a

given situation or time. It connotes submission to rules or some kind of order (Wilson & Lipsey, 2007). Similarly, Williamson (2012) defined discipline as an educative order that is trying to teach the right rules for its intrinsic values. According to Mgboro and Eke (2013), discipline is teaching students to observe school laws and regulations and to respect authorities. Discipline involves submission to rules which structure what one has to learn, whether these rules are of a subject, language, games or living in a society (Asiyai, 2012). However, to Anwana and Akpan (2007) and Simatwa (2012), discipline is training, not only of the mind, but also in self control and confidence, to produce an orderly behaviour or character in an individual. From the different definitions of discipline, inference can be drawn that discipline is a constructive life style of a human being involving the maintaining of human relationship with others. It involves training that develops good character, orderliness, and promotes efficiency and maximum profitability.

Nature of Discipline Problems in Schools

Common among disciplinary problems in schools are rule violation, disruptiveness, bullying, sexual harassment, refusal, defiance, fighting and vandalism (Kendziora & Osher, 2009). Wilson and Lipsey (2007) reported that British schools often battled with vandalism, inattentiveness, idleness, fighting, truancy, bullying etc. Aziza (2005) and Maphosa & Mamman, (2011) reported an increase in cases of indiscipline in South African schools. Danso (2010) observed the prevalence of indiscipline such as drug abuse, abortion, rape and armed robbery in educational institutions in Ghana. Yahaya, Hashim and Ibrahim (2009) reported highly ranked disciplinary problem of student hangout, truancy, absenteeism, stealing, fighting and poor class attendance in Malaysia. In Nigerian secondary schools, students' indiscipline has reached an epidemic stage (Nakpodia, 2010). The percentage of students who drop out of schools in urban and rural areas is much higher. Such students develop and exhibit deviant behaviour, may never fulfill their potentials and become burden to the society (Asiyai, 2012). There is high rate of examination malpractices in Nigerian education system at all levels. There is prevalence of organized cheating in both internal and external examinations in secondary schools (Ogbonna, 2006). Bullying in schools is on the increase (Uzoka, 2007). Disciplinary problems in Nigerian secondary schools generally range from examination malpractice to truancy, indecent dressing, lack of respect for teachers, cultism, teenage pregnancy, bullying, vandalism, fighting etc. Failure to deal with these behaviour problems effectively contributes to poor individual, school and community outcomes (Conoley & Goldstein, 2004).

Responses of Schools to Discipline Problems

In the past, school-wide discipline has focused mainly on reacting to specific student misbehavior by implementing punishment-based strategies including reprimands, loss of privileges, office referrals, suspensions, and expulsions. Research

has shown that the implementation of punishment, especially when it is used inconsistently and in the absence of other positive strategies, is ineffective. Introducing, modeling, and reinforcing positive social behaviour is an important step of a student's educational experience. Teaching behavioral expectations and rewarding students for following them is a much more positive approach than waiting for misbehavior to occur before responding. The purpose of school-wide PBIS is to establish a climate in which appropriate behaviour is the norm (PBIS, 2015).

Schools typically respond to disruptive students with external discipline, which consists of sanctions and punishment such as referrals, corporal punishment, suspensions and expulsions. At least 48% of public schools in the United States of America took a serious disciplinary action against a student during 2005-2006. Among these actions, 74% were suspensions lasting 5 days or more, 5% were expulsions, and 70% were transfers to specialized schools (Dinkes, Kemp & Baum, 2009). Such responses present a short term to what often is a chronic and long term problem. Segregation with antisocial peers for example can increase antisocial behaviour and punitive approaches to discipline have been linked to antisocial behaviour and increased vandalism (Gottfredson, 2005).

School discipline entails more than punishment. It is complex and includes developing self discipline (Bear, 2005). Discipline is the opposite of indiscipline (Osher, Bear, Sprague and Douyle, 2010). Both discipline and indiscipline are transactional phenomena nested in classroom, school and community ecologies. The interactions that produce disciplined behaviour (or indiscipline) are mediated and / or moderated by the developmental needs of students; teacher, student, and school culture; student socio-economic status; school and classroom composition and structure; pedagogical demands; student and teacher role expectations and capacity to meet the institutionally established expectations for their roles; and school climate. These transactions can involve issues of student-school fit; bonding to school; academic demands; school support for at risk youth; differential beliefs and responses of adults to challenging behavioural and gender factors (Osher, George, Jeffrey, & Walter, 2010). This article presents school wide positive behavioural supports (SWPBS) approach that lay credence to improving school disciplinary practices and student behaviour.

School wide Positive Behavioral Supports

Two universal approaches to school wide discipline involve:

- School wide positive behavioral supports (SWPBS), which are school wide systems to communicate and teach rules (and reward students for following them) and function-based behavioral interventions (Centers on 1'osicive behavioural Interventions and Supports).

With respect to discipline, in teacher-centered approaches, the primary focus is on external school rules and the adult use of behavioural techniques, especially positive reinforcement and punishment, to manage student behaviour. In student-centered approaches, the primary focus is on developing students' capacities to regulate their own behaviour and in building, caring, engaging, and trusting relationships. Whereas SWPBS programmes tend to be teacher centered, SEI programmes are student centered. Still, the two approaches have much in common. In addition, both emphasize the prevention of problem behaviours and through promotion of behavioral and social competencies; emphasize "positive" techniques over punitive techniques; and recognize the crucial role of academic instruction and the participation of teachers, administrators, students, families, and communities.

The SWPBS Approach to Discipline

SWPBS is a comprehensive and preventive approach to discipline (Sprague & Golly, 2005). The primary aim of SWPBS is to decrease problem behaviour in schools and classrooms and to develop integrated systems of support for students and adults at the school, classroom, and individual student (including family) levels. SWPBS is based on the hypothesis that when teachers actively teach, using modeling and role playing, and reward positive behaviors related to compliance with adult; requests, academic effort, and safe behaviour, the proportion of students with mild and serious behavioural problems will be reduced and the school's overall climate will improve (Sugai, Horner & Gresham, 2002).

SWPBS can be subsumed under the *positive behavioral supports* (PBS), which has its roots in behavioural theory (Skinner, 1974) and its applications in applied behaviour analysis. *Positive behavioral supports* (PBS) was initially developed to intervene with and support, students and adults with significant intellectual disabilities and severe behaviour problems. SWPBS procedures are organized around three main themes: prevention, multitiered support, and data-based decision making. Prevention involves defining and teaching common set of positive behavioural expectations, acknowledging and rewarding expected behaviour, and establishing and using consistent consequences for problem behaviour (including teaching or re-teaching alternative behaviours). The goal is to establish a positive school and classroom climate in which expectations for students are predictable, directly taught,-consistently acknowledged, and actively monitored.

Research-based support programmes for students at risk of antisocial behaviour follow a three-tier approach, operating at the *universal* (school wide), *selective* (for students who are at risk), and *indicator* for students who are the most chronically and intensely at risk levels. The greater the student's need, the more intense and detailed that support should be. Selective and indicated supports should be based on the principles

and procedures of applied behavior analysis to define behavioural challenges, complete functional behavioral assessments, and design effective and efficient procedures for correcting patterns of problem behavior in conjunction with student- and family-centered planning approaches (Bekowetz & Schwartz, 2006).

SWPBS schools also provide regularly scheduled instruction in desired social behaviours to enable students acquire the necessary skills for the desired behavior change, and they offer effective motivational systems to encourage students to behave appropriately. SWPBS classrooms in SWPBS schools have the same set of common School expectations posted, and teachers develop classroom-level rules and reinforcement: systems consistent with the school wide plan. In addition, class room-handled versus administrator-handled behavioral problems are clearly defined, and data on patterns of problem behavior are regularly summarized and presented among staff meetings to support decision making and practice consistency.

Research suggests that schools can establish clear expectations for learning and positive behavior while providing firm but fair discipline. SWPBS builds on a solid research base to design alternatives to ineffective administrative, teaching, and management practices in a school (Bekowetz & Schwartz, 2006). These include (a) setting a small number of positively stated rules and expectations (b) teaching appropriate social behaviour, (c) monitoring compliance with rules and expectations, (d) consistently enforcing, rule violations with mild negative consequences and (e) providing a rich schedule of positive reinforcement for appropriate social behaviour. The behaviour support strategies needed to establish a school wide social culture should be supplemented with classroom interventions and individualized supports for students with chronic and immense problem behaviour.

Conclusion

This article identified the transactional nature of discipline, the multiple factors that affect discipline, and the importance of the school wide context. It examined School wide Positive Behavioural Supports approach to creating a disciplined school environment. However, challenges of collaboration with families remain. Families play a key role in improving behaviour and engagement, but families often are estranged from schools, particularly parents of children with behavioral problems. The mental health needs of some students may require intensive supports, and the aggregate mental health needs of students in some schools may be so great that, as a group, these students Incapacitate their schools by negatively socializing other students and/or by demoralizing staff driving adult behaviour in unproductive directions. These schools may need effective mental health services and internal systems to facilitate appropriate conditions for discipline and learning (Kendziora & Osher, 2009). These challenges are often related. Addressing them will likely improve the impact of the approach. Overall,

these challenges may become greater because of the worldwide economic downturn, which may exacerbate risk factors that are the sequelae of stress and poverty and eviscerate safety nets that buffer these risk factors' impact. The problems may be compounded if accountability problems fail to overcome the barriers that teachers and students face in creating productive, disciplined learning environment. In the light of this, data collected during periodic monitoring of schools' conditions of learning and demographics to identify evidenced strategies and practices by States and Local Government staff can be used to improve safety, support, academic challenges, and social- emotional learning to monitor the effectiveness of interventions and in so doing, to improve discipline.

Recommendations

Decreasing problem behaviour in schools is surely the target of education stakeholders. The School wide Positive Behaviour implementation approach renders useful support to decreased school problem behaviour as it emphasises (a) supporting social competence and academic achievement (b) supporting staff behavior (c) supporting decision making (d) supporting student behaviour. In Nigeria, developing integrated systems of support for individual student and at the school wide, classroom and including family is still a challenge principally as a result of lack of required resources that support the adoption and continuity implementation of evidence based practice and procedure. The SWPBS if implement however will trigger off the need to put necessary machineries in place for effective functioning. Required resources include:

- School and classroom teaching/learning materials as well as teachers' skilled effort to effectively apply teaching learning to motivate required behavior of learners. Training and retraining of school staff for efficient performance of goal is to be given priority. This is to enable classroom interventions and individualized supports for students with chronic and immense problem behavior and also help students acquire the necessary skills for desired behavioural change.
- Periodic monitoring of schools by States and Local Government staff should be ongoing to identify and rectify problems that hinder the safety, support, academic excellence, and social- emotional stability of students and school staff and in so doing, to improve discipline.

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