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ABSTRACT

This study sought to examine strategies of teams of teachers who have established their own discipline plans and compare them to teams of teachers who have not developed discipline plans. It is based on interviews with 28 team leaders from 5 middle schools in northwest Georgia, 9 of whom indicated that they had organized, written discipline plans in use. Data were also collected via surveys of 10 teachers who had participated in a discipline workshop. The results indicated that most teachers using a team-wide discipline plan were using some form of interventionist discipline strategy, and that the teachers who used this strategy thought that it was successful and positive for teachers, students, and parents. Teachers who did not follow a team-wide plan expressed little desire to communicate with each other. Team leaders without team-wide discipline plans indicated that teachers should handle their own discipline problems. Recommendations in regard to discipline strategies and practice include: (1) Administrators need to be made aware of the advantages of teamwide discipline plans; (2) teachers need to communicate with one another their own discipline philosophy and attempt to communicate with and about the students on their team; (3) teachers who are using belittling or destructive means of discipline should be encouraged to change their strategies; and (4) more research needs to be conducted to determine the amount of noninterventionist strategies that are being used to begin to capitalize on the benefits of such plans. (MDM)

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"Discipline Plans in Middle Schools"

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Discipline Plans in Middle Schools.

Major Objectives

Solving discipline problems has been identified as the most difficult aspect of teaching. The objective of this study is to examine discipline strategies of teams of teachers who have established their own plans and compare them to teachers who have not by analyzing teachers' perceptions of the plans and problems teams with plans and those without plans encounter.

Propositions of the Study

1. A description of middle school discipline plans in northwest Georgia will reveal the extent to which the three theories of discipline are used.
2. Teachers on teams who use a team wide discipline plan will show evidence of more effective behaviors than teams who do not establish team wide discipline plans.
3. Possible ways to improve school plans is expected.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study centers around discipline strategies. Discipline strategies range from interventionist strategies to noninterventionist strategies as shown in Table 1. Those who follow interventionist strategies consider assertive discipline plans or behavior modification plans effective for the control of children in classes. An interactionist develops communication with students in order to come up with a discipline plan. The noninterventionist uses listening models in the classroom and develops a common respect and understanding of one another through a variety of activities throughout the year.

Each of these strategies has advantages and disadvantages in the classroom. We can examine the theories to determine what may work best for a team of teachers in a middle school.

Table 1

Philosophies of discipline: A continuum of strategies

INTERVENTIONIST (overt teacher control)	INTERACTIONIST	NONINTERVENTIONIST (covert teacher control)
rules/rewards/ punishment models	confronting/contracting models	relationship/ listening models

Theories

Interventionists. Lee Canter suggests that teachers need to set expectations and follow through with consequences in order to establish proper behavior. His ideas include: insisting on responsible behavior, maintaining the rights of teachers to teach

and students to learn, establishing a system of verbal and consequential follow-through of misbehavior (Charles, 1989). Assertive discipline is an example of an interventionist model.

An interventionist approach can be achieved systematically with relatively little training. The program, while it may be militant in nature, includes a system of rewards that works much the same way as the consequences.

Interactionists. Interactionists can best be associated with teachers who rely on logical consequences or a democratic approach to ensuring proper behavior. Rudolf Dreikurs is the originator of the logical consequences approach (Duke, D.L. & Meckel, A.M., 1984). Basically, this approach places the responsibility of knowing and following rules on the students, basing the entire approach on self respect. The consequences of the misbehavior are related to the offense. Students and teachers work together in this approach to develop the rules and consequences of misbehavior (Charles, 1989). William Glasser's reality therapy is an example of a model considered to be an interactionist approach. Little is done to determine why a student may be misbehaving. The focus is on stopping the misbehavior and gives little opportunity for the student to express himself.

Noninterventionists. Jacob Kounin focuses on an approach to maintaining proper behavior by creating a "classroom atmosphere conducive to learning" (Charles, 1989, p. 37). His approach uses preventive discipline strategies such as engaging all students, and remaining aware of what is going on in the classroom. Communicating with students is Kounin's and Haim Ginott's approach to helping students understand and respect one another and a course. Ginott believes in allowing students to express, accept, and acknowledge feelings. Both support a positive atmosphere based on communication. The problem with this strategy is that it takes time to establish a "group" feeling.

Educational significance

Considering that discipline is a major concern of most teachers, this study could help bring out what teachers are doing that is helping kids and what they could be doing to help kids more. It may be possible to activate new evidence to support having teams of teachers work together to reduce the number of discipline problems and begin to identify why this is effective. It is hoped that a more noninterventionist approach will indicate more positive responses from teachers in middle schools.

Methods

A multiple qualitative case study approach was used. Multiple case, as its name implies, uses similar or identical settings in a variety of places as testing sites. The logic of multiple case studies has been compared to the consideration of multiple experiments. By examining multiple cases within a

larger unit, a study can be regarded as more robust. Furthermore, if similar results are obtained, compelling support for the propositions of a study exists (Yin, 1984).

Three major sources of data were collected over a period of 4 months. Team leader interviews, interviews with informants (teachers and administrators), and surveys, were compiled and compared. Informal negotiations with teachers and administrators allowed further confirmation of perceptions of team leader interviews.

Interviews of 28 team leaders from 5 schools took place after school and lasted for 30 minutes. The researcher attended each of the schools involved to discuss discipline strategies, and problems in establishing teamwide discipline plans with team leaders. A comparison of teams using discipline plans is compared to teams without discipline plans. Informants from each school and administrators were interviewed informally to compare their perceptions of the school and the teams with the data that was collected from the team leader interviews.

Surveys were sent to 35 participants of a discipline workshop where the three types of theories were explained by the researcher and her colleague. The percentage results of the survey as to the number of teams who practice team wide discipline was compared with the data collected from the team leader interviews.

Each source of data was examined separately using a coding system as recommended by Bogdan and Biklen (1982). Specific examples of the various types of discipline theories, evidence of benefits and problems, and concerns of teachers were examined. Percentages of the types of plans that were followed as well as the philosophies of the individual teachers were compared to the survey data. From the surveys, suggested categories of concerns were extracted and included in the coding system. From the data, a description of teams in the five schools was gleaned.

Selection of sites

Selection of sites was limited by the availability of the researcher and was further stifled by the administrators who were reluctant to have research conducted in their school. Originally, 6 schools were slated for participation. Due to a time conflict, only 5 administrators were open to having a researcher enter their school. Of the 5 schools participating in the study, 2 schools were made up of three teams each, 2 schools had 6 teams each, and one school had 10 teams. All of the schools were in cities of less than 60,000. All five schools serve rural communities. Three of the schools are in one county. The other two schools are the only middle schools in the county chosen. A total of 28 team leaders were interviewed.

Questions

1. What type of discipline plans exist in middle school teams?
2. What are the benefits of working as a team of teachers with a discipline plan?

3. What are the problems teachers encounter working as a team of teachers with a discipline plan?
4. What are the discipline perceptions of teachers who do not have a team discipline plan?

Teams with and without discipline plans

Team leaders in five schools in northwest Georgia were asked to share their discipline plan. Of the 28 teams represented in this study, 9 had organized, written plans that they were using to maintain behavior. In one school, 5 teachers had discipline plans written down on a sheet of paper but they did not refer to the discipline plan as a strategy. The plan was referred to as a requirement from the office. The other 14 teams that represent this study had no discipline plan.

Table 2

A comparison of team leader percentages of types of discipline approaches to responses from surveys

Percentage of members using each philosophy	team leaders		surveys	
	with plans	without plans	with plans	without plans
Interventionists	79%	89%	57%	100%
Interactionists	11%	11%	14%	0%
Noninterventionists	11%	0%	29%	0%
	N=9	N=19	N=7	N=3

Types of strategies teachers use

From the data, strategies teachers use in their classrooms or on their teams were extracted (see Table 2). Out of the 28 teams, 23 of the team leaders gave responses that resembled interventionist strategies such as using a marking system, sending a note home after 3 offenses, not allowing students to eat with their peers after 6 offenses, etc.. In all of the responses, no reference was made to the punishment being consistent with the offense. Of the 9 teams that had discipline plans, 7 of the team leaders were among the 23 teams using an interventionist approach.

Teachers who used time out as a strategy, including what behavior should have been displayed, and allowed students to assist with the consequences of classroom misbehavior represented an interactionist approach. Four team leader responses were

indicative of interactionist strategies toward discipline. One of the team leaders who had discipline plans used this approach.

The noninterventionist approach was found in the responses of 1 team leader. That team leader's team did have a discipline plan in place for her team. The noninterventionist strategies included talking with students, treating every child different, discussing the misbehavior one on one and communicating the action with team members.

Statistics of surveys that were collected indicated similar percentages of responses suggesting that teams of teachers most often utilize an interventionist approach to establishing discipline plans on teams. In the surveys however, more teachers appeared to use strategies consistent with a noninterventionist approach than the team interviews suggested. A difference may be that those teachers surveyed having attended a workshop on discipline may be more likely to use a more nonconventional approach.

Teams with discipline plans

Benefits were gleaned from the data from teams who had discipline plans including: communication regarding concerns of children, consistency of plans allowing students to be unable to manipulate teachers and allowing students to see that teachers are working together, opportunities for parents to be better informed about their child, and opportunities of teachers coming together as one.

When teachers were willing to communicate their concerns regarding students, they were more likely to share ideas of how to deal with individual students or talk with students on an individual basis or as an entire team. Students were less likely to challenge teachers regarding rules and consequences for misbehavior when rules were consistent among team members and teachers were consistent in their response to misbehavior. Teachers who utilize a team wide discipline plan believed that they made a difference in students' lives more easily if they agree upon a base line of behavior management. While team leaders who had a plan most often used an interventionist approach, their responses suggest that they used noninterventionist strategies. One of the comments that expressed a noninterventionist's view was that "the teacher's main purpose was to let children know that they were accepted as individuals but needed to develop more positive input into the class."

One of the concerns of teachers with discipline plans was a lack of consistency among team members toward each other and toward the children they teach. Teachers were also described as appearing to have differing tolerance levels for noise, and some could be pushed a little further than others in the classroom. Teachers with interventionist discipline plans mentioned having a plan and getting lazy and not following the plan. Noise level differences, personalities on teams, and structure within classrooms were mentioned from teams in all 5 schools.

Teams without discipline plans

Those teachers who did not follow a team wide discipline plan were not as likely to indicate communication with teachers or students as effectively as those team leaders whose teams had plans. Those teams who mentioned not using a discipline plan were more likely to have teachers who varied extremely with regard to a philosophy of discipline, as well as a differing philosophy of the middle school concept.

Teachers who did not have a plan expressed no desire to communicate with one another. "We do our own thing," was a frequent comment of teachers whose teams did not have a common plan. On at least two of the teams there were teachers described as often yelling at kids. Many teachers on teams who did not follow a team plan identified no understanding of the purpose of communicating about students. Their comments included: "We don't have any reason to talk about kids unless there is something really wrong." Another comment that "our discipline plan was just another example of the many hoops we have to jump through here" indicates a lack of understanding or commitment to the purpose of a discipline plan.

Team leaders responded to the concerns they faced regarding discipline on their teams. The acceptance that most teachers should and can handle their own discipline problems was a common response of those teams who did not have a discipline plan. One team leader said, "we don't talk to people about what we do. I don't feel we have to." Comments such as "it's everybody for themselves" or "we do our own thing", suggests a lack of communication among teachers.

A lack of control was also evident among teams of teachers who did not have a team wide discipline plan including such comments as "we have teachers who yell at students", "new teachers tend to do their own thing", and "I just get in his face and give him the facts of life". These comments suggest an unwillingness to communicate effectively with children.

Teachers without discipline plans mentioned problems of teachers who would not talk to one another about what they were doing. One team leader said his team members sometimes used time out, sometimes moved children to other teacher's rooms, or sometimes gave writing assignments as forms of punishment reflecting the inconsistencies that were apparent on teams who did not follow a discipline plan.

Parent support was mentioned by team leaders without a discipline plan as a concern. Specifically, teachers in schools indicated that parents were not supporting the teachers' efforts to change a student's behavior. One team leader mentioned that 20 parents had been contacted for a parent conference and only 2 parents had followed through with the request to meet.

Teachers without disicpline plans indicated evidence that some sort of practice was beneficial. Teachers believed that documenting misbehavior was very valuable with regard to parent conferences and when students were referred to administrators because of behavior problems. Team leaders who did not have discipline plans agreed that documentation was a valuable

practice on teams but this did not seem to influence them in their use of a team wide strategy.

Conclusions

This study reveals that most teachers in today's middle schools in northwest Georgia who are using a team wide discipline plan are using some sort of interventionist strategy. Those teachers who are most likely using the plan agree that it is successful and positive for the teachers, students, and parents. Team leaders of teams with plans also believe that administrators support their efforts.

Most discipline plans reflect a school or district-wide plan and have limited deviations from the plan. Teachers with discipine plans have fewer concerns and see more benefits of having a team plan than do teams of teahcers without a plan. Those team members who choose not to have a discipline plan are more often dissatisfied with the discipline and the teachers on their teams.

This researcher does not agree that an interventionist approach to discipline is what middle school age children need. On an interventionist level, behavior is only dealt with temporarily instead of working with children to become more self-directing with regard to behavior.

Responses to the propositions

If we look back to the propositions of this study, the team leaders in northwest Georgia have given consistent responses to discipline practices on teams.

Proposition 1. A description of middle school discipline plans is revealed including the three types of theories examined. Most team leaders expressed the use of an interventionist approach. Very few teams use either an interactionist or noninterventionist approach. However, while approaches used may lean toward interventionist approaches, there is evidence that noninterventionist strategies are being used by teachers.

Proposition 2. Comments from team leaders with plans indicated a more constructed, problem solving approach to teaming. Team leaders with plans responded that communication among team members was a key in operating with a discipline plan. Teachers without plans responded with little evidence of communication or a desire to work together. Their responses were most often complaints about teaching styles and a lack of administrative support.

Proposition 3. This study supports the use of team discipline strategies. Team leaders with plans had more positive comments about how their teams handled discipline. The school that used team plans most effectively had administrators who were committed to allowing teachers the opportunity to create their own plans and who encouraged their efforts.

Recommendations

Several recommendations can be given based on the data that was collected.

First, administrators need to be made aware of the advantages of team wide discipline plans and should be encouraged to actively support teachers in making such plans. Encouraging team members to establish discipline plans and educating teachers regarding alternatives to interventionist methods may bring about more communication between teachers and students.

Second, teachers need to communicate with one another their own discipline philosophy and attempt to communicate with and about the students on their team. Each of the concerns mentioned by team leaders who did not have team plans including consistency among team members, communication of team members with children, teachers, and parents can be alleviated with efforts by team members to work together and plan successful team discipline plans everyone is comfortable with.

Third, teachers who are using belittling or destructive means as their primary source of discipline should be encouraged to change their strategies. No where in society does anyone deserve to be yelled at as a means of reprimand from someone they are supposed to have respect for.

Finally, more research needs to be conducted to determine the amount of noninterventionist strategies that are being used to begin to capitalize on the benefits of such a plans. Furthermore, teachers need more inservice to develop strategies in written form that adhere to noninterventionist approaches.

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