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ABSTRACT

Organizational changes, within the existing structure of public schooling, have the potential to decrease the oppositional behavior of students and to foster humane, positive learning and working enviroments. It has been documented that managers can create organizational structures that promote positive behaviors and facilitate people's willingness and ability to assume responsibility for what they do within the organization. Applied to schools, this approach assumes it is far easier to change organizational structure and culture than it is to "fix" the people within schools. Additionally, a structural-cultural approach attacks the sources--for most students--of oppositional behavior and thereby increases school authorities' ability to respond appropriately to the relatively few students whose serious misbehavior demands exceptional disciplinary treatment. Thinking about school discipline as a problem of organizational structure and culture is a more useful and pragmatic approach than searching for a one-best technology or single strategy that probably does not exist. Moreover, improving discipline by altering the dominant forms of curriculum and instruction within schools--a strategy that addresses significant sources of student opposition to schooling--is likely to be a more enduring strategy than the historically bankrupt effort to end misbehavior by relying on instructional control via closer monitoring and stricter punishment. (56 references) (KM)

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A CULTURAL-CHANGE APPROACH TO SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

Reaction paper to

School Organization and Student Behavior

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Historians tell us that disorder and violence have been features of schools for centuries. For example, school children in 17th century France were often armed, feared by their school mates and ordinary citizens alike (Aries 1962), while in English public schools, between 1775 and 1836, "mutinies, strikes and violence were so frequent - and sometimes so severe - that the masters had to call upon the military for assistance" (Newman 1980, p. 7; see also Aries 1962, p. 315-328). Here at home, the level of discipline within schools, as well as schools' contribution to social discipline, or its lack, have been persistent educational issues for over two hundred years (see, for example, Nasaw 1979). This continuing concern with order and discipline has been accompanied by an equally historic effort to discover the best means by which students' behavior in schools can be controlled, their character improved and their behavior outside of school channeled in pro-social directions. Toward these ends, solutions have ranged from Plato's recommendations in The Republic that poetry and drama be censored to insure that students only encounter morally correct models of thinking and behavior, to the use of corporal punishment - for example, during the mid-1800's, Horace Mann reported observing 328 separate floggings in one week in a school of only 250 students (cited in Newman 1980) - to the life adjustment curricula and social engineering theories of the progressive reformers in mid-20th century U.S., to current proposals that urge schools to "get tough" with students, end all vestiges of permissiveness and expel those students (assuming judicial non-interference) who are habitual troublemakers (see, for example, Toby 1980).

The historical nature of school disorder does not necessarily mean that the search for discipline in schools is likely to be frustrating, even though a final answer has eluded us for several hundred years. As Duke's paper, and some of the others presented here make clear, research has provided a variety of promising school-level strategies that can reduce student misbehavior, increase appropriate behavior, or accomplish both.

What this history does suggest, however, and this is a reasonable starting point for an attempt to understand what should be done to improve student discipline, are the following: First, unless there is solid evidence that successful discipline methods were simply abandoned, it is reasonable to assume that approaches unable to guarantee proper behavior in the past (like corporal punishment and harsh, punitive discipline) are unlikely to do so in the present. Second, the enduring nature of misbehavior in schools indicates that the problem is not a technical one that can be efficiently managed or solved in isolation from other aspects of the school; instead, it is a systemic problem related to the institutional nature of schools as they have been structured (e.g., batch processing, separation from adult community life), to the social conditions in which schools operate at any historical moment (e.g., race relations, labor market needs), and to the developmental characteristics (e.g., emotional, cognitive) of school-age youth. Third, assuming the above, school discipline is most likely to be genuinely improved by comprehensive approaches rather than by disciplinary methods that treat only the symptoms of the problem (i.e., the misbehavior itself) while leaving

untouched the underlying causes. Since social conditions and child and adolescent development are beyond that school's control, educators must focus on those changes that can lead to new forms of student work and human relations within schools and that will result in greater engagement by students (and staff) in the schools' mission.

Ultimately, this may require fundamental changes in the structure and/or process of schooling. In the meantime, organizational changes, within the existing structure of public schooling, have the potential to lower the oppositional behavior of students and create humane, positive learning and working environments. It is this sort of organizational perspective that underlies, though is not explicit, in Duke's paper.

Put in slightly different terms, an organizational approach assumes that changes at the organizational level can alter people's subjective experiences and ultimately their beliefs and behaviors. For example, in a theoretical discussion of school level factors that contribute to student alienation (as reflected in behaviors ranging from absenteeism to low quality schoolwork to vandalism) Newmann (1981) proposes altering organizational features that research has linked to greater or lesser amounts of alienation in a variety of institutional and social settings. These features include school size, the degree of hierarchy (superordinate-subordinate role relations), staff and student participation in decison making, opportunities for cooperative work, organizational goal clarity, and so forth. He argues that such "objective" changes in the school's structure will affect individuals' perceptions of the school and their relationship to it.

Similarly, O'Toole (1981), who is primarily concerned with increasing productivity and innovation in private and public sector organizations, states that "changing personalities or behavior to achieve effective organizaional change" is a "near-impossible task" (p. 117). He suggests that attention be focused on the "organization context" in which people work, that is, the structure of relationships and the ideology of the organization. By changing these organizational variables new behaviors can be encouraged and inappropriate behaviors discouraged. For example, re-designing organizations to permit and reward diversity of task, encourage participation in decision making, and allow for the occupational choice and mobility of members is an organizational strategy that, according to O'Toole, can result in greater committment by organizational members to the goals and processes of that organization.

Neither Newmann nor O'Toole suggest that people be released from taking responsibility for their actions. Both, however, argue (and O'Toole documents) that we can create organizational structures that promote positive behaviors and that facilitate people's willingness and ability to assume responsibility for what they do within the organization. Indeed, organizational change (particularly new forms of management) aimed at developing productive workplace cultures (discussed in more detail below) is precisely the means currently advocated in the private sector for changing the behavior of workers and revitalizing American industry and business (see, for example, Deming 1982; Kantor 1983; O'Toole 1981; Peters and Waterman 1982).

Applied to schools, this organizational approach assumes that it is far easier to change organizational structure and culture than it is to "fix" the people within schools.

More importantly, perhaps, a structural-cultural approach attacks the sources, for most students, of oppositional behavior and thereby increases school authorities' ability (i.e., time, energy, resources) to respond appropriately to the relatively few students whose misbehavior is so serious as to demand exceptional disciplinary treatment.

If it is true that factors at the level of the organization are critical to student discipline, it remains to be determined which factors or levers are likely to prove most powerful. In what follows, I will first offer a general observation stimulated by Duke's literature review and then will comment on an approach that incorporates much of what I find persuasive in the research upon which he comments.

To begin with, there is a noticable lack of hard data that can be used to select any particular school-level strategy for student discipline over another, no doubt because such data are not available. Without knowing the size of the effect of using school-wide discipline plans compared to involving students in school decision making, for example, it is rather difficult for practitioners to know where to put already scarce resources. Moreover, the presented data do not permit making causal connections between specific strategies and student behavior, especially changes in student behavior. For example, there seems to be a clear relationship between school leadership and orderly student behavior. In one analysis of

the High School and Beyond data, researchers found that less disorder was reported by teachers in whose schools the principal was perceived as "strong" in terms of getting resources for the school, buffering teachers from outside interference, setting priorities and making sure plans were carried out, having and communicating a vision of the school, and letting staff members know what was expected of them (Newmann, Rutter, & Smith 1985). However, the dynamics of that relationship between leadership and discipline are not clear, as Duke points out (see also, Manasse 1985). Not only could there be intervening or alternative, unrecognized variables, producing orderly student behavior, but we have no very convincing evidence that the characteristics of leadership in good schools are those necessary to instill discipline in disorderly schools.

If we acknowledge, then, that the school-level data do not yet support either a one-best strategy or causal connections between specific strategies and changes in student behavior, what is to be done? Duke correctly argues that as research continues, educators must, nevertheless, act to improve discipline in schools where its absence is interferring with teaching and learning. In any event, that educators will initiate improvement projects without waiting for the results of research has been demonstrated repeatedly, most recently by the fact that approximately 1/3 of all high school principals report having begun an effective schools project, seemingly unconcerned by or unaware of significant criticisms about the quality of that research (Purkey, Rutter, & Newmann 1986).

Another way of looking at the lack of a one-best strategy, however, is that within limits, including those suggested by the research reviewed in Duke's paper, it may not matter which strategy a school adopts. Put another way, no single method can be said to work across all schools, but a variety of strategies can probably be successful in any given school. Note that this statement emphatically does not mean that anything goes, merely that there are a number of possible options and that we probably have enough information at hand that can provide us with useful maps of how to get where we want to go.

Consistent enforcement of clear rules by teachers and administrators (Metz 1978), involving students in rule-setting (McPartland & McDill 1976), smaller schools or within-school units (Gottfredson & Gottfredson 1985) all appear to be valid mechanisms for directly or indirectly improving discipline. What seems to be critical, however, and missing from Duke's paper, is how to get a school's staff to focus their attention on the issue and to work together toward a clear and internally consistent set of goals relative to establishing order. Again within limits, the problem is less "what works" but is more "how do we implement what works?" If staff members value order and discipline, come to a common understanding of what they want to accomplish and how, and consistently channel their energy in that direction, it is likely that they will be successful, assuming that the strategy they select is at least logically connected to student behavior and that factors external to the school are not overwhelmingly influential. (See Rutter et al, 1979, whose descriptions of effective

British secondary schools illustrate the importance of agreement on goals and consistent enforcement of rules; see also Purkey & Smith 1985).

Unfortunately, it is here that the available research is most unsatisfactory. While successful change projects seem to share certain characteristics (see Huberman & Miles 1984), we have a very imprecise understanding of the nature of the change process across all possible school sites. More to the point, there does not appear to be a single factor that, in all settings, will necessarily result in staff agreement and focused activity. Nevertheless, drawing from the literature on educational change and innovation, a prima facie case can be made that the following are necessary, though probably not sufficient, for forging a commonality of purpose among a school's staff:

(1) Strong leadership, which is essential, but can come from staff other than the principal, and can assume a variety of forms (see, for example, Barth 1980; Gersten et al. 1982; Hall et al. 1983; Hargrove et al. 1981;

(2) The involvement of those who will be affected by the change in the decision making process which is necessary for ownership and proper fit (see, for example, Berman & McLaughlin 1977; Elmore 1978; Fullan 1985);

(3) The support of the central office which must be expressed in both concrete and symbolic terms (see, for example, David & Peterson 1984; Pink 1986; Purkey & Smith 1985).

(4) Resources, especially technical asistance, release time, and on-going staff development, perhaps in direct proportion to the magnitude of the change sought (see, for example, Berman & McLauglin 1977; Hulberman & Miles 1985; Purkey & Smith 1985);

(5) Enough time for major changes in staff behavior or beliefs (2-3 years) but not so much time (i.e., not open-ended) that there is no pressure to make a change (see, for example, Miles et. al. 1983; Purkey 1985);

However, having argued that the problem of establishing order in schools lies in getting staff (and students) to work cooperatively toward a valued common goal (which, to some extent, makes this a generic problem of organizational change) it remains to be determined whether, nevertheless, one means might be more desirable than another, and if so why. To simply view the problem as one of translating theory into practice or replicating models is the epitome of the technocratic approach criticized earlier.

As Duke emphasizes, "discipline can become an end in itself, rather than a means to productive learning" (p. 25). (Indeed, that confusion of ends and means happened in several schools in the urban effective schools project I studied that was cited by Duke in his paper.) Another point can be made here, however, which is that we must distinguish between disciplined schools and disciplined students (see Gaddy 1986). While docility and conformance to school rules can undoubtedly be coerced, the development of the sort of self-discipline that is likely to transfer to non-school situations seems to require giving students opportunities for choice and for assuming responsibility for the functioning and maintenance of the school (see, for example, Newmann 1981; Sprinthall & Mosher 1978). Indeed, there is little convincing evidence that repressive control or harsh punishment diminishes student misbehavior, and some evidence that it can actually exacerbate student resistance (e.g., Gottfredson 1986; Kulka et al. 1982; Rutter 1980).

What this discussion suggests, therefore, in reference to Duke's paper, is that strategies seeking to directly influence student behavior, especially those that are excessively preoccupied with discouraging inappropriate conduct, could prove counter-productive in the long run. Even if order is restored to schools (and this is problematic), there may be repercussions elsewhere in society. To that extent, attacking symptoms is likely to prove less effective than attempts to get at root causes. As a lever to get at the roots of the problem, in-so-far as schools can do so independently of the social conditions within which they exist, the cultural approach discussed by Duke (p. 27) would appear to be the most powerful.

Operationally, school culture refers to the values or guiding beliefs and to the norms or daily behavior and practices of the people within the school; current research has revealed the following about this vague but powerful construct called school culture: (as summarized by (Patterson, Purkey, & Parker 1986, p. 97-98)[1]

(1) School culture does affect the behavior and achievement of elementary and secondary school students (though the effect of classroom and student variables remains greater);

(2) School culture does not fall from the sky; it is created and thus can be manipulated by people within the school;

(3) School cultures are relatively unique; whatever their commonalities (e.g., sense of leadership, clear and shared goals), no two schools will be exactly alike - nor shoudl they be;

(4) The elements of school cultures interact with each other to produce a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts; while individual aspects of the school culture can affect a child for better or worse, it is the child's encounter with the entire school culture that seems most influential;

(5) Particularly, but not exclusively, at the secondary level, different groups of students (subpopulations) experience the school's culture diferently; similarly, students' peer cultures and/or community cultures may not be in harmony with the school's;

(6) To the extent that it provides a focus and clear purpose for the school, culture becomes the cohesion that bonds the school together as it goes about its mission.

(7) Though we concentrate on its beneficial nature, culture can be counterproductive and an obstacle to educational success; culture can also be oppressive and/or discriminatory for various subgroups within the school;

(8) Lasting, fundamental change (e.g., in organizational process or teacher behaviors) requires understanding and, often, altering the school's culture; cultural change is generally a slow process;

The above notwithstanding, Duke is correct when he points out that school culture is difficult to define (see also Anderson 1982). To that, we can add the confusion generated by the use of multiple terms for what seems to be essentially the same phenomenon (e.g., Rutter et al. 1979, use the term ethos; Goodlad 1984 speaks of school climate; Hawley et al 1984 refer to the learning environment), and the difficulty of measuring and evaluating culture. Nevertheless, research persists in identifying culture as a significant variable separating effective, and orderly, schools from ineffective, and disorderly schools. This should not be surprising because when culture is broken, down into its constituent parts, it is evident that the concept incorporates many of the factors Duke has associated with an orderly school environment. In other words, school discipline, like student achievement, is a result of a web of factors that have a cumulative impact on staff and student behavior. Translating this into concrete practice is the problem, of course, but managing organizational culture is not an impossibly complex task (see Deal & Kennedy 1982, 1983; Patterson, Purkey, & Parker 1986).

Thinking about school discipline as a problem of organizational structure and culture is a more useful and pragmatic approach than searching for a one-best technology or single strategy that probably does not exist. A structural-cultural perspective also reminds us that it is students' experience with the whole school, as well as the congruence between the values and norms of the school and those of the students' homes, neighborhoods and workplaces, that determines whether groups of student will comply with school regulations and expectations or resist them. (Note, however, that individual students, while certainly subject to the same forces, make individual choices in any given situation - manipulating school culture is designed to encourage certain choices over others.)

Compatible with the structural-cultural approach advocated here, Cohen (1983) suggests, in a review of the school and teacher effectiveness literature, that schools must be communities with a moral order that relies on "the internalization of goals, the legitimate use of authority, and the manipulation of symbols, as means of controlling and directing the behavior" of their members (p. 31). Lightfoot (1983) argues that good schools, however imperfect they may be, gained control as part of the "development of a visible and explicit ideology" that provided cohesion within the school comunity and engendered feelings of identification, affiliation and loyalty. Finally, Lipsitz (1984) describes successful schools as developmentally healthy communities having distinct cultures that include, among other things, the means by which order is generated, "reciprocity in human relations", leadership and clarity of purpose.

Discipline is vital to the success of these schools, but order is achieved within the context of rather unique cultures that establish communities of purpose. And, just as organizational culture can be manipulated, so too can community be established within schools via cooperative work activities, relationships, between students and faculty that extend beyond the classroom, democratic governance, the use of ceremony and ritual to express shared purposes and committments, the recognition and acceptance of diverse talents, skills and personal attributes of staff and students alike, and so forth. Contrast this approach, in its intent and its philosophical base, with the opposite approach which would impose order by the essentially punitive use of increased control, surveillance, and monitoring mechanisms.

Finally, adopting a structural-cultural change approach to improving student discipline reminds us that curriculum and instruction can be seen as school-level variables. Whereas schools have often been criticized for unchallenging curricula and instructional methods that promote emotional passivity and intellectual sterility (e.g., Boyer 1983; Everhart 1983; Goodlad 1984; McNeil 1983) it is equally true that different forms of curriculum and instruction can engage students in authentic learning activities that are intrinsically satisfying. Abstractly, this suggests integrating knowledge across subject areas, linking knowing and doing, connecting school work to the on-going life of the community, emphasizing student participation in the creation of knowledge, providing opportunities for cooperative work, employing inquiry and problem solving, encouraging

the use of products that require synthesis or creativity, and holding students to high standards of quality (see Newmann 1981; Sizer 1984). Concretely, it might resemble the Foxfire program (Wigginton 1985), the Paideia proposal schools (Adler 1982) or the Coalition for Essential Schools (Sizer 1984) to name but a few of the possible models.

Just as stimulating curriculum and instruction in a single classroom contributes to its orderly atmosphere (which is not necessarily quiet), so too can intrinsically satisfying and engaging curriculum and instruction across all classrooms result in a purposeful and orderly school. Without denying the importance of clear rules, consistently enforced and fairly applied, order and discipline that stem from the nature of the academic work in schools is certainly preferable. Granted, there is little evidence that demonstrates, at the school level, the effectiveness of this strategy for improving student discipline (for one exception, however, see Lipsitz 1984). It is clear, also, that significant changes in organizational culture may be necessary to alter the prevailing forms of curriculum and instruction, and that such fundamental change is exceedingly difficult. Nevertheless, models do exist, even if primarily at the classroom level, and there is no compelling reason to think they can not be replicated throughout schools given the necessary conditions for implementing any major cultural change[2]. In any event, if successful, improving discipline by altering the dominant forms of curriculum and instruction within schools is, in the long run, likely to be a more enduring strategy because it addresses significant sources of student opposition to schooling than does the historically bankrupt effort to end misbehavior by relying on institutional control via closer monitoring and stricter punishment.

In brief, then, while I think that Duke has written an excellent review of the extant literature on organizational strategies for improving student discipline, I would argue that in the absence of a one-best method, students and staff would be better served if schools focused on altering their organizational structure and culture to create healthy environments in which to work and learn.

In closing, a final but crucial point must be made. While schools are treated here as isolated institutions, in reality the external environment intrudes on them in myriad ways. This can be critically important for the issue of discipline - in fact for all questions of student performance in schools. For example, to the extent that students perceive a bleak future outside of school, or encounter peer or other reference groups whose beliefs and values run counter to the official message of the school, students will be less willing, especially at the secondary level, to comply with school rules. This may be particularly true for those economic groups whose experience has convinced them that the historical contract alledged between getting an education and getting a good and satisfying job has been broke. That is why projects such as the Boston Compact may, ultimately, be a better <u>single</u> disciplinary strategy than any one of the school-level proposals reviewed in Duke's paper. (See Willis 1977 and Ogbu 1978 for an extended discussion of the manner in which school can conflict with the cultural values and norms of students' non-school lives and the implications of this conflict for student behavior.)

Similarly, to the extent that student misbehavior is associated with poor performance in school (see, for example, Gottfredson 1986) programs that can improve students' academic skill development in the elementary grades are also likely to significantly reduce schools' discipline problems. Therefore, at the other end, so to speak, school discipline might also be attacked by early childhood education programs such as the Perry Preschool Project in Ypsilanti, Michigan. (see, for example, Berrueta-Clement et. al. 1984). While neither a "head start" nor a good job is sufficient (by themselves or in combination) these sorts of non-school strategies, together with the cultural-structural approach discussed previously, must be a part of any long-range strategy for improving school discipline if we are genuinely interested in discipline as the means to a better education for all and not simply as the "end" of increased control.

Notes

1) See also Anderson 1982, Bacharach et al. 1986, Brookover et al. 1979, Cohen 1983, Coleman et al. 1982, Goodlad 1984, Hawley et al. 1984, Lieberman and Miller 1984, Lightfoot 1983, Lipsitz 1984, MacKenzie 1983, Purkey and Smith 1983, Rosenholtz 1985, Rutter et al. 1979, and Sarason 1971.

2) Case histories such as Wigginton's (1985) description of the origin of the Foxfire program, recent critical studies of secondary school classrooms (e.g., Powell, Farrar, Cohen 1985; Sizer 1984) and ethnographic explorations of classroom teaching and student work (Everhart 1983; McNeil 1983) converge to suggest that classrooms in which authentic learning takes place (i.e., that reflect the criteria enumerated above) are orderly and productive. It is only logical to assume that, except for an incorrigible minority of students, student disorders would be greatly reduced in buildings throughout which students were engaged in work they found meaningful, challenging and satisfying.

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