DIFFERENCES IN OFFICE REFERRALS WITH THE LEADER IN ME

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ABSTRACT

This study was completed to determine if there is a significant difference in office discipline referrals in a school without the Leader in Me implemented one year and with the Leader in Me implemented the following year. The reasons for the referrals should be considered when looking at the differences between the two school years. The amount different teachers integrated the seven habits from the Leader in Me in the classroom should be considered as well. Finding of this study shows that in one school that implemented the Leader in Me had fewer office discipline referrals than the previous year when the program was not in place. The reasoning behind this data is not pinpointed in the study, but administrators at Leader in Me schools have expressed how implementing the program has created a more positive atmosphere in their schools and therefore, has decreased the amount of office discipline referrals. After reviewing the findings of this study and current research of Leader in Me schools, it is found that implementing the Leader in Me shows a decreasing number of office discipline referrals.
INTRODUCTION

Background, Issues and Concerns

It is common for there to be concerns among classroom teachers with students who misbehave in class. Sometimes these misbehaviors can result in an office discipline referral, commonly known as a “write up”. Misbehaviors, especially those that lead to office discipline referrals, interrupt instructional time for not just the student involved, but for the other students in the classroom. It is important to ensure students are receiving the maximum amount of instructional time possible. Limiting the distractions and misbehaviors can help teachers make that possible. Some may wonder if there is a difference in the amount of office discipline referrals when a behavior plan is in place compared to when a behavior plan is not in place.

Practice under Investigation

The practice under investigation has looked at monthly comparisons of discipline referrals from the previous year without The Leader in Me implemented and the current year with The Leader in Me implemented. The office discipline referral categories include: disruptive behavior, disrespectful behavior, fighting, and assault. There was an investigation to see if there is a significant difference in office discipline referrals without a behavior plan in place and with The Leader in Me implemented.

School Policy to be Informed by Study

Behavior that results in office discipline referrals typically interrupts instructional time. So, if there is a significant difference in office discipline referrals with The Leader in Me implemented compared to no behavior plan in place, then teachers should continue to use the 7 Habits language and review and reteach the 7 Habits with their students.
**Conceptual Underpinning**

All students are raised and taught differently in different environments. One difference teachers must learn of each student is the way he/she reacts to certain situations or behaves in and out of the classroom. While one student may have learned how to work well with other peers in the classroom, another student may have never had the opportunity to learn appropriate ways to converse or work well with others. Stephen Covey’s *The Leader in Me* focuses on teaching the whole child- focusing on skills such as problem solving, creativity, teamwork, communication, cultural sensitivity, etc. (Covey, 2009). Depending on how the student was raised or what the student is accustomed to, the teacher may have to spend more time focusing on certain habits more than the others. With a positive learning environment, which is what the Leader in Me brings, student achievement will ultimately increase. Research shows that with the Leader in Me, student achievement and test scores rise from focusing on three aspects: the whole child, the whole school, and imagination (Covey, 2009).

**Statement of the Problem**

If there is a difference in office discipline referrals with The Leader in Me implemented, then teachers need to know how to effectively continue implementing The Leader in Me in not just the classroom, but throughout the school as well.

**Purpose of the Study**

To find if there is a significant difference in a school’s office discipline referrals without a behavior plan in place and with the Leader in Me in place.
Research Question(s)

RQ1: Is there a difference in office discipline referrals when no behavior plan is in place compared to when the Leader in Me is in place?

Null Hypothesis(es)

There is no difference in office discipline referrals when a behavior plan is not in place compared to when the Leader in Me is in place.

Anticipated Benefits of the Study

If there is a difference in office discipline referrals when no behavior plan is in place and when the Leader in Me is in place, then teachers will need to continue to teach, review, and instill the 7 Habits within their school community.

Definition of Terms

SWPBS- School-Wide Positive Behavior Support- a three tier model that uses preventative measures to decrease unwanted behaviors in a school setting.

PBS- Positive Behavior Support- A system to understand an individual’s challenging behavior.

ODR- Office Discipline Referral

Summary

A study was conducted to determine if there was a significant difference in office discipline referrals with no behavior plan in place and with The Leader in Me program implemented. If the t-test concludes there is a significant difference, teachers should continue to implement the 7 Habits from The Leader in Me within the classroom and school. Because all students have been raised differently with different beliefs and views, it is important for teachers to have an understanding and open mind when teaching the
seven habits to students, especially those who routinely have discipline referrals. After this study is completed, other schools and school districts can benefit from looking at the comparison data and providing professional development to teachers on purposeful behavior plans and a school-wide positive atmosphere, specifically The Leader in Me, if needed.
Review of Literature

Safe, positive learning environments are important aspects of a school. According to Sugai & Horner (2001), “learning and teaching occur best in school climates that are positive, orderly, courteous, and safe. Defiant, disruptive, and violent behaviors decrease the effectiveness, efficiency, and relevance of teaching and learning for everyone” (p. 2). Defiant and disruptive behaviors lead to office discipline referrals (ODRs), which take away learning time from the student involved and students in the classroom, as well as valuable time from the teacher, principal, and others involved. According to Irvin et al. (as cited by Pas, Bradshaw, & Mitchell), ODRs are defined as “events in which a staff member observes a student violating a school rule and submits to documentation of the event to the administrative leadership, who then delivers a consequence to the student” (p. 1).

Therefore, it is important for schools to find a system that will create a positive school climate in which children feel safe, welcome, and have a desire to be in school. A positive school climate can have a positive impact on the following: grade point average, standardized test scores, reading levels, academic writing, school adjustment, and reduced occurrences of student misbehavior such as: drug use, aggression, antisocial behavior, absences, suspension, school violence, behavior problems, and student delinquency (Caldarella, Shatzer, Gray, K.R. Young, & E.L. Young, 2011). Contributing factors to the amount of ODRs in a school include: consistency in implementation of classroom rules, classroom management, disorder in the classroom, teacher characteristics, faculty turnover rate, school size, and socioeconomic status (Pas,
Many researchers agree that in order to prevent undesired behaviors, then an efficient behavior plan must be in place. As stated by Walker et al. (as cited by Hawken, MacLeod, & Rawlings, 2007), “implementing a continuum of effective behavior support (from least intensive to most intensive) is recommended to prevent and respond to problem behavior in school settings” (p. 94). Also, there have been many studies conducted on different behavior supports to reduce behavior issues and discipline referrals in the classroom.

Positive Behavior Supports (PBS) is one approach schools have adopted to reduce behavior issues, which in turn reduces ODRs. According to the Center on Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (as cited by Sugai & Horner, 2001), “PBS is a broad range of systemic and individualized strategies for achieving important social and learning results while preventing problem behavior.” (p. 3). According to Sugai and Horner (2001), “the goal of PBS is to enhance the capacity of schools to educate all students, especially students with challenging social behaviors, by establishing an effective continuum of PBS systems and practices” (p. 3). PBS proves to be effective regarding ODRs. In a PBS school, the expectations are visible for all staff and students to view, a majority of students, staff, and families can state the expectations, and the school-wide behavioral expectations are taught and encouraged for all students (Sugai, 2001). According to Sugai and Horner (2001), ODRs decreased by 40-60% in this particular study.

Another behavior support system is School-wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS), which is similar to PBS. According to Calderella, Shatzer, Gray, K.R. Young, & E.L. Young (2011), it is “based on the assumption that approximately 80% of students
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respond to universal or primary level interventions, which explicitly teach and reinforce behavioral expectations to all students in a school” (p.2). SWPBS schools focus more on a healthy school climate, rather than office discipline referrals or school suspensions (Calderella, Shatzer, Gray, K.R. Young, & E.L. Young, 2011).

Another study was conducted by the University of Utah to determine the effectiveness of the Behavior Education Program (BEP). According to Hawken, MacLeod, & Rawlings (2007), BEP is a “system of support that is implemented with students who are not responding to primary-level prevention efforts” (p. 95). The study found that the BEP was effective for the majority of students. With the BEP, there were fewer ODRs for misbehavior. March and Horner (as cited by Hawken, MacLeod, & Rawlings, 2007) discovered in their study that the BEP reduced the rates of ODRs in middle school students. They found that 67% of the students with the BEP intervention had reduced the amount of ODRs they received.

Another program that principals are finding reduces discipline issues is The Leader in Me. Stephen Covey published The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People in 1989. The first person to implement the 7 Habits of Highly Effective People (7 Habits) into an educational setting was Muriel Summers, principal of A.B. Combs in Raleigh, North Carolina. A.B. Combs was close to losing magnet status and so therefore, Summers had the idea of bringing the 7 Habits into her school after hearing Covey speak in a seminar. Through a new mission statement, “To Develop Leaders, One Child At A Time”, Summers incorporated the 7 Habits and leadership into the school. From that point, The Leader in Me was developed. The program claims to produce “transformational results such as higher academic achievement, fewer discipline
problems, and increased engagement among teachers and parents.” (FranklinCovey, 2014, p.1).

In his book that introduces the same named program, *The Leader in Me*, Covey stated (2008), “In short, what these educators are doing is teaching basic leadership principles to young students- as young as five years old. They are teaching often neglected skill sets for making good choices, for getting along well with others, and for managing time wisely. In addition, they are providing authentic opportunities in the classroom, in the school, and in the community. All this they are doing in a way that is improving student achievement and restoring discipline and a character ethic in the classroom and on the playgrounds” (p. 4).

School teams participating in the professional development for *The Leader in Me* typically undergo a three year process for learning the *7 Habits* and the implementation process. The *7 Habits* are taught within this timeframe so that the teachers can teach them in a more child-friendly manner to their students. The *7 Habits* in *The Leader in Me* are:

- **Be Proactive**: This is the first habit taught within the *7 Habits*. According to FranklinCovey, being proactive means to “take responsibility for your choices and behaviors” (*Annotated Teachers*, 2009, p. 4). Students learn that when they are proactive, they are the leaders of their own lives. Statements they learn include: “I am the leader of my own life”, “I am the leader of whether I’m happy or sad”, and “I am the leader of how I react to other people or situations” (*Annotated Teachers*, 2009, p. 4).

- **Begin with the End in Mind**: This is the second habit taught within the *7 Habits*. According to FranklinCovey, when you begin with the end in
mind, you “think about how you would like something to turn out- before getting started” (Annotated Teachers, 2009, p. 10). A child may say, “I plan ahead and set goals. I do things that have meaning and make a difference. I am an important part of my classroom and contribute to my school’s mission and vision” (Covey, 2009, p. 65).

- **Put First Things First:** This habit means to “decide what is most important and take care of it first” (Annotated Teachers, 2009, p. 17). When learning and following this habit, a child may say, “I spend my time on things that are most important. This means I say no to things I know I should not do. I set priorities, make a schedule, and achieve my goals. I am disciplined and organized” (Covey, 2009, p. 65).

- **Think Win-Win:** When students learn this habit, they learn that everyone can win. According to FranklinCovey, “it’s being able to be happy when good things happen to other people” (Annotated Teachers, 2009, p. 24). When a student is learning this habit, he/she may say, “I balance courage for getting what I want with consideration for what others want. I make deposits in others’ emotional bank accounts. When conflicts arise, I look for third alternative. I look for ways to be a good citizen” (Covey, 2009, p. 65).

- **Seek First to Understand:** This habit focuses heavily on practicing listening as a skill. When students are taught this habit, they are taught “that it is better to listen first and talk second” (Annotated Teachers, 2009, p. 30). When following this habit, students may say, “I listen to other
people’s ideas and feelings. I try to see things from their viewpoints. I listen to others without interrupting. I am confident in voicing my ideas. I look people in the eyes when talking” (Covey, 2009, p. 65).

• Synergize: When students learn the sixth habit, Synergize, they are learning to “work together to create a better solution than either would have thought of alone” (Annotated Teachers, 2009, p. 36). Students may say, “I value other people’s strengths and learn from them. I work well in groups, even with people who are different from me. I seek out other people’s ideas to solve problems because I know that by teaming with others we can create better solutions than any one of us can alone” (Covey, 2009, p. 65).

• Sharpen the Saw: When students learn this habit, they are learning to add balance to their lives. According to FranklinCovey, “Habit 7 reminds us that we are more productive when we are in balance: body, brain, heart, and soul. If one area is being ignored or overused, the rest will feel the results” (Annotated Teachers, 2009, p. 45). Students may say, “I take care of my body by eating right, exercising, and getting sleep. I spend time with family and friends. I learn in lots of ways and lots of places, not just at school. I take time to find meaningful ways to help others” (Covey, 2009, p. 65).

From implementing the 7 Habits, schools reported they saw “improved student achievement, significantly enhanced self-confidence and esteem in students, dramatic decreases in discipline problems, impressive increases in teachers’ and administrators’
job satisfaction and commitment, greatly improved school cultures, parents who are delighted and engaged in the process, business and community leaders who want to lend support” (Covey, 2008, p. 4). In addition, due to the fewer accounts of disrespect, there were fewer ODRs and teachers are able to focus on academics. Whenever there are ODRs, time is taken away from the classroom teacher, the students, and the principal.

One popular question is how teachers and principals find the time to implement the leadership theme. According to Covey (2008), “…the fact is that they spend far less time putting out fires and trying to make minor decisions than the average principal. Why? Because they have empowered others— including students— to do many of the leadership tasks, and because there are fewer fires to put out” (p. 80).

In fact, nearly every school implementing the leadership theme have found that discipline issues are significantly down (Covey, 2008, p. 87). According to Covey (2008), “a number of teachers have insisted that the number one benefit of the leadership theme is how it helps with classroom management and schoolwide discipline” (p. 87). A study conducted by the Center for Advanced Research at FranklinCovey found positive results such as these mentioned in Joseph Welsh Elementary School in Alberta Canada. According to this study (2010), prior to The Leader in Me, the “combined in-school and out-of-school suspensions averaged 31; after The Leader in Me, the same category averaged 13- a 58 percent reduction in suspensions” (FranklinCovey, p. 3). The school saw a 68% reduction in office discipline referrals (FranklinCovey, 2010, p. 1). Another school finding a reduced amount of ODRs is Harnett Primary School in North Carolina, which over the past two years dropped from 64 ODRs to 34 ODRs in a year (“Harnett
Examples from Hatch and Collinwood (2010) detailing other schools reaping the benefits of a reduction in ODRs include:

- English Estates Elementary (Fern Park, Florida): ODRs reduced from 225 to 74 in slightly over a year
- Dewey Elementary (Quincy, Illinois): ODRs dropped 75% after the first year of implementation
- First Nation (Nova Scotia): Within the first six months of implementation, the school had zero suspensions, compared to the previous year with twenty suspensions.

In addition to the reduction of ODRs, the principal of Crestwood Elementary in Medicine Hat, Alberta, Canada, David George, explained that after implementation of The Leader in Me, students come into his office able to problem solve and take responsibility for their actions, compared to before when “they would point fingers at the other student, or offering all kinds of excuses” (Hatch and Collinwood, 2010, p. 1).

Obviously, not all discipline issues are demolished due to circumstances that are out of a teacher’s or principal’s hands. However, teachers at Leader in Me schools feel that it is helpful to have less time spend on discipline issues because students are so familiar with the 7 Habits.

As stated by Covey (2008), “It is very difficult to motivate a child to learn when they feel threatened physically or emotionally. That is why A.B. Combs feels so strongly that when the discipline issues arise, they should be handled proactively (nonemotionally), keeping the end in mind and first things first, while thinking win-win, seeking first to understand, and synergizing around third alternatives.
And because the students have been taught these principles, in many cases the problems are resolved by the students themselves, using the 7 Habits framework” (p. 87).
Research Methods

Research Design

The independent variable being tested was implementation of The Leader in Me, while the dependent variable tested was the number of discipline referrals. If the difference is found significant in scores based on The Leader in Me, teachers should continue to implement the seven habits from The Leader in Me.

Study Group Description

Students from a Midwestern community were chosen as the group evaluated. This community has 456 students in kindergarten through sixth grade. There are 83.3% white and 9.9% black. 65.6% are on free or reduced lunch.

Data Collection and Instrumentation

Data was collected through the principal, who collectively compared the discipline referrals from the previous to the current year with The Leader in Me implementation.

Statistical Analysis Methods

A descriptive analysis and t-test were conducted to determine if there is a significant difference in discipline referrals in a year without a behavior plan in place compared to a year with The Leader in Me implemented. The Alpha level was set at .25 to test the null hypothesis.
Findings

A t-test was conducted to determine whether there was a difference in ODRs in a school with no behavior support in place compared to the following year with The Leader in Me implemented. The following tables, graphs, and charts will depict the organized findings based on the data from the months September through January of the 2012-2013 school year and the months September through January of the 2013-2014 school year. These are the only two school years of data to examine since The Leader in Me was introduced at the beginning of the 2013-2014 school year.

Figure 1

**t-test Analysis Results for 2012-2013 school year and 2013-2014 school year office discipline referrals**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Mean D</th>
<th>t-test</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No TLIM</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With TLIM</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6.90</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.00231</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Significant when p<=0.25

The two school years were selected to show data for ODRs. The 2012-2013 school year did not have TLIM in place. The 2013-2014 school year was the first school year with TLIM in place. During the first quarter, the 7 Habits were being taught for the first time. A larger decline in ODRs is seen in second quarter, when the 7 Habits were in place, being refreshed and reviewed daily. The data was collected for the months of September, October, November, December, and January. The mean of the year with no TLIM in place was 20.4 and the mean of the year with TLIM was 10.4. The Mean D, or difference between the two school years, was 10. The t-test result was 6.90 and the df
was 4. The null hypothesis states there is no significant difference in office discipline referrals when TLIM is in place. The null hypothesis is rejected because the p-value, .00231, is lower than the alpha level. This shows that having TLIM in place does significantly impact the amount of office discipline referrals.

Figure 2

The mean of the office discipline referrals in the year with no TLIM was 20.4 each month. This means that each month, there were around 20 ODRs. The mean of the ODRs for the year with TLIM was 10.4. This means that each month, there were around 10 office discipline referrals. The pie chart shows that the number of ODRs is less in the year with TLIM in place compared to the year without.
Conclusions and Recommendations

The outcomes reported from this study show that there were less office discipline referrals at this school with The Leader in Me implemented than there was the previous year with no behavior plan in place. The findings show there is a significance difference between office discipline referrals with The Leader in Me and without The Leader in Me. The t-test results indicated that the p-value was .00231, much lower than the alpha level set at 0.25. The null hypothesis was rejected. There is a difference in office discipline referrals with The Leader in Me in place and without The Leader in Me in place.

The conceptual underpinning of author Stephen Covey is supported by these research findings. Covey developed the 7 Habits of Highly Effective People. From those 7 Habits, The Leader in Me was developed to teach kids how to become leaders and follow the 7 Habits in their everyday lives. The benefits of teaching the 7 Habits to students prove to be beneficial compared to not teaching the 7 Habits. Teachers should implement teaching the 7 Habits to their students in order for them to become leaders in the school and within the community.

After concluding this study, there are further studies to be conducted. In the 2014-2015 school year, it will be the second year this school will be implementing The Leader in Me. Previous students that attended this school during the 2013-2014 school year will be familiar and experienced with the 7 Habits. The teachers also would have received additional training prior to the 2014-2015 school year. Additional research for the following school years would show if there was a continual decline in office discipline referrals. Additional research could be studied to determine if students’ academic achievement rose as well with The Leader in Me.
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