



Transforming School Discipline: Innovative Strategies for a Safe and Positive Learning Environment

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Abstract:

The issue of school discipline has garnered increasing attention as educators and policymakers recognize the need for innovative strategies to foster a safe and supportive learning environment. Traditional disciplinary practices have often fallen short of creating conducive atmospheres for academic success. This study delves into the effective school discipline model and strategies that foster a safe and positive learning environment. Developing an effective school discipline model involves establishing a comprehensive framework that promotes a positive and respectful learning environment. This paper describes an effective school discipline model: ABCs of Positive Behavior. This model emphasizes creating an environment that prevents behavioral issues through clear expectations, positive relationships, and an inclusive culture. When behavioral issues arise, the model offers a range of responsive strategies, from teaching self-regulation to employing fair consequences and restorative practices. The collaborative approach involves parents, staff, and students in the disciplinary process, fostering a sense of shared responsibility for maintaining a positive school climate. The model supports ongoing professional development for staff and encourages a reflective and adaptive approach to discipline, promoting continuous improvement. By evaluating these innovative approaches, the research aims to offer theoretical-based insights and recommendations for educators and policymakers. The ultimate goal is to contribute to the evolution of disciplinary frameworks that prioritize students' well-being, cultivating environments where learning flourishes and students feel safe, supported, and empowered to succeed both academically and personally.

Index Terms: Restorative practices, Social-emotional learning, Positive behavior

1 Introduction:

School discipline is a many-sided aspect of education that plays a crucial role in shaping the learning environment and students' overall development. This crucial facet encompasses the rules, strategies, and

policies employed by educators and administrators to maintain order, foster a positive atmosphere, and uphold academic and personal growth. Unfortunately, school discipline programs tend to focus quite heavily on the behaviors, and often have algorithms of adult-imposed consequences that are applied to change those behaviors (Ross, 2018). Evertson and Emmer (2009:145-146) believe that two important categories of behavior should be observed in class: student involvement in learning activities and student compliance with classroom rules and procedures. Effective school discipline goes beyond traditional punitive measures, espousing a holistic approach that considers the social, emotional, and psychological well-being of students. Rewards and punishments do not unravel the problems that are causing exigent behavior (Greene, 2018). From a legal and ethical standpoint, many educational institutions and jurisdictions have recognized the negative impacts of physical punishment, leading to its barring in numerous places. Instead, educational professionals are encouraged to adopt positive discipline strategies, such as restorative justice and behavior modification, to create supportive learning environments that foster personal development and academic success without resorting to harmful practices. One such alternative that has gained attention is the role of student leadership in discipline. This approach diverges significantly from the punitive nature of corporal punishment. Instead of focusing on reprisal, it emphasizes empowerment, responsibility, and community involvement (Kyeremeh, 2023). As another alternative, the restorative approach to discipline entails a process that appears to be more aligned with a holistic and educationally accustomed conception of the best interests of the child (Reyneke et.al, 2017). Creating more connections and greater constancy within school, family, and community contexts may be one way for schools to improve student behavior and school discipline (Sheldon et.al., 2002). Engaging parents and the community fosters a cohesive, supportive student environment, extending positive influences beyond school, and enhancing holistic development. This introduction seeks to unravel the complexities of school discipline, emphasizing the importance of creating environments where rules are not merely enforced but contribute to a safe, supportive, and transformative educational experience for all students. Exploring effective disciplinary models and innovative strategies, this study aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse surrounding best practices in school discipline.

2 Review of Literature:

Punitive disciplinary measures in schools such as zero-tolerance and “get tough” policies, or the accomplishment of physical searches, locks, fences, or cameras have been widely criticized. Several alternative disciplinary interventions have been introduced (by schools, educational leaders, teachers, etc.) to address misconduct and anti-social behavior. Schools should actively transition from traditional punitive measures, such as corporal punishment, to more positive and constructive discipline practices. This shift involves promoting an environment of empathy, communication, and understanding, which is central to managing student behavior. By focusing on teaching fairness, responsibility, and the consequences of actions, students learn to internalize positive behaviors rather than simply fearing punishment (Kyeremeh, 2023)

This is most evident when adult control, orderly rewards, clear rules and outlooks, and consequences for misbehavior are the primary techniques used to manage behavior. When those external techniques are later separated, individuals are expected to function autonomously after having learned little other than “don’t get caught”. (Varnham, 2005)

About 35-45% of students who are suspended become repeat offenders (Costenbader, 1994), and suspensions are associated with increased involvement in the juvenile justice system (Fabelo, 2011). This process begins in elementary schools with the probability of later suspensions in middle school with the probability that students who have been suspended three times are more will drop out of school altogether (Raffel, 2003). The adults who inward school exclusions reported higher levels of drug use and antisocial behavior (McCrystal et.al, 2007)

In the words of Cameron and Thorsborne “School behavior management plans have focused largely on what should happen (penalties and tariffs) to offenders when (school) rules are broken, with only limited understanding of the impact on those in the school community of the offending behavior. Restorative justice in the school setting views misconduct not as school rulebreaking, and therefore a violation of the institution, but as an infringement against people and relationships in the school and wider school community”.

3 Research Questions:

The research focuses on the following questions:

- What are the Challenges to effective school discipline?
- What are the innovative Strategies to transform school discipline for a safe and positive learning environment?

4 Research Objectives:

The study concentrates on the following objectives:

- To understand and analyze the challenges to effective school discipline.
- To innovate an effective school discipline model that fosters a safe and positive learning environment.

5 Discussion

5.1 Challenges To Effective School Discipline

The futility of corporal punishment

Corporal punishment, involving the physical infliction of pain as a means of discipline, has long been a controversial practice. Increasingly, research and societal attitudes highlight the ineffectiveness and detrimental consequences associated with this form of punishment. Firstly, studies consistently show that

corporal punishment fails to instill long-term behavioral change. While it may produce immediate compliance, it often leads to resentment, fear, and aggression, rather than promoting understanding or personal growth. Furthermore, corporal punishment can hinder the development of a positive student-teacher relationship. Trust and respect are essential for effective teaching and learning, and resorting to physical punishment erodes these foundational elements, potentially creating a hostile learning environment. Socially, corporal punishment perpetuates a cycle of violence. Students subjected to physical discipline may internalize the idea that aggression is an acceptable means of conflict resolution, potentially contributing to a culture of violence within schools and society. Evidence suggests that corporal punishment may aggravate behavioral issues rather than determine them. (Samuel et al., 2019)

Flaws in Exclusionary Discipline

Exclusionary discipline, such as suspension or expulsion, often fails to achieve its future purpose of behavior conversion. Instead of addressing the core causes of misconduct, it can aggravate issues, contribute to a cycle of disengagement, and encumber students' academic and social development. Removing a student from school, for whatever reason, is counterintuitive since it punishes a student by removing him or her from the learning environment. Additionally, the research identifies that such suspensions are not a deterrent to future misbehavior (Kevin F McNeill, 2016).

5.2 School Discipline Model: The ABCs of Optimistic Behavior

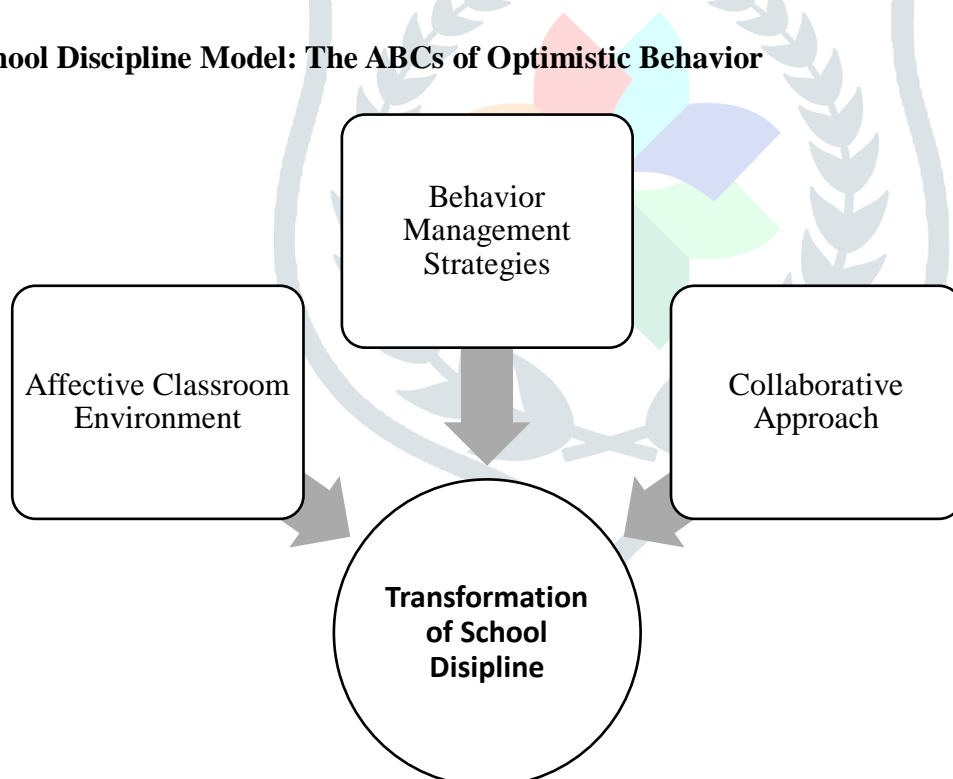


Figure 1: School Discipline Model: The ABCs of Optimistic Behavior

A – Affective classroom environment

- ***By Establishing Clear Expectations***

This point emphasizes the importance of transparency and clarity in conveying what is expected of students in terms of behavior. Teachers need to articulate and communicate explicit rules, guidelines, and outlook for conduct within the classroom. This includes both academic and social expectations, such as how students should treat each other, how they should participate in discussions, and what is considered suitable behavior. Established conventional procedures and routines (George, 2010), rules, and the consequences of breaking them should be specified and communicated to staff, students, and parents by such means as newsletters, student assemblies, and handbooks. Meyers and Pawlas (1989) recommend intermittently restating the rules, especially after students return from summer or winter vacation. Once rules have been communicated, fair and steady enforcement helps maintain students' respect for the school's discipline system (Gaustad, 1992). Teachers should overtly define and articulate the core values that govern interactions, relationships, and overall behavior within the class. This might include values like respect, cooperation, empathy, and responsibility. By establishing a foundation built on shared values, teachers create a positive and organized classroom community where students understand the guiding principles that contribute to an accommodating and respectful learning environment. positive relationships are built on trust, respect, and open communication. Regarding verbal communication, teachers should utilize an encouraging language tone, avoid language that is overly authoritative or disdainful, utilize a rate and rhythm of speech that is even and smooth, and calmly deliver warnings and reminders. Regarding nonverbal communication, teachers should use eye contact also, use nonverbal cues as warnings when behaviors are amplifying also the teacher should be aware of the force of tone, volume, cadence, positioning, and stance (Muriithi, 2013).

- ***Inclusive and Supportive Culture***

Teachers need to value the diversity in today's classrooms and recognize the contributions of these differences to themselves and their learners. Hurtado (2001) asserts that interactions across diverse cultures and racial or ethnic groups in a classroom are beneficial as they serve to prepare those involved for living in a complex and diverse society. The diversity "becomes a necessary part of the curriculum." Bornman and Rose (2010) state that the best way for teachers to accommodate diversity is to endeavor to create a supportive classroom environment. Such a supportive classroom environment develops a strong sense of belonging – belonging to a group that endeavors to share common norms, values, and behavior. This can be considered a culture in itself. Diversity in terms of cultures, beliefs, norms, socio-economic circumstances, language, gender, ability, age, and parental expectations posed challenges in the way these influenced learners' behavior in class (Donohue, et.al 2014)

B – Behavior Management Strategies

▪ *Restorative Justice: Healing Harm, Building Harmony*

Howard Zehr (2002), a colonist in the field of Restorative Justice, defines Restorative Justice as “a process to involve, to the extent possible, those who are most involved in or have a stake in a specific offense and to communally identify and address harms, needs, and obligations, to heal and put things as right as possible” (p. 37). Zehr developed three questions that have guided Restorative Justice: • What is the impairment that has been done? • How can that impairment be repaired? • Who is accountable for the repair?

School-based RJ practitioners draw on a range of practices counting various forms of talking circles (e.g., for building community, addressing harm, providing support, facilitating reentry); mediation; casual one-to-one conversations; social-emotional learning; mental health support; and more. Often, multiple strategies are used in blend, and adapting to the needs of a given circumstance (Talia Sandwick, 2019).

▪ *Social Emotional Learning*

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) is an educational approach that focuses on sprouting students' skills in self-awareness, self-regulation, social awareness, interpersonal relationships, and responsible decision-making. Cleveland is training all prekindergarten to fifth-grade teachers in an SEL curriculum called Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies in which classroom lessons that uphold emotional literacy, self-control, social competence, positive peer relations, and interpersonal problem-solving skills are carried out two or more times a week for a minimum of 20 to 30 minutes per lesson (Gregory, A., et, al 2017).

▪ *Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)*

The initial goals of PBIS are focused on the development and maintenance of an optimal environment for good education and positive relationships, such as increasing positive and civil social behavior, encouraging increased family engagement in schools, and improving the school climate for students and staff. Long-term outcomes sought include: enduring positive changes in behavior; reduction in the need for serious disciplinary measures such as suspension and expulsion; and improvements in outcomes for all students, plus those with challenging behavior and educational disabilities (Horner, R. H, 2005). Schools that have implemented PBIS have fruitfully reduced office transfer, raising academic achievement, and improved school climate by setting clear behavioral outlooks, rewarding the right behavior, utilizing progressive discipline, and providing individualized interventions for students with chronic behavior problems (McNeil et.al 2016).

▪ *Developing Self-Discipline*

Self-discipline is seen in socially and ethically responsible behavior that is motivated principally by inherent factors, not solely by the anticipation of external rewards or fear of punishment. Research shows that self-discipline promotes positive relations with others and a positive school climate, fosters academic achievement, and promotes a sense of worth and emotional well-being. (Osher, 2010). “promote self-discipline through cooperative interaction between persons in the learning environment. There should be role modeling of the discipline code by faculty and staff and an emphasis on positive feedback and cooperation”, say Antes and Nardini (1994: 218.) Their opinion underscores the importance of the development of self-discipline in learners as well as the very important role the educator has to play in the development thereof by setting an optimistic example (De Klerk, J., 2003).

C – Collaborative Approach

▪ *Parental Involvement*

parental involvement means understanding first the reason why your child is being disciplined at school, then getting information about what s/he can do to rectify the situation instead of simply leaving it up to teachers and school administrators to enforce discipline(Ireland,2017). Effective inter-communication between parents and other school authorities, rewarding students for their pleasant behavior to increase their occurrence, visiting students at school for discipline issues, and attending school meetings on discipline are the areas under which parents should play a great role in their students’ discipline control(De Dieu, H. J.,2021). The benefits of parental involvement include improved school performance, reduced drop-out rates, a decrease in delinquency, and a more positive attitude toward school (Van Deventer and Kruger, 2009).

▪ *Professional Development For Staff*

First, a teacher must be convinced a new strategy, curriculum, or instructional innovation will have a positive impact on student learning (Guskey, T. R., 2002). Change in practices that are associated with improved student outcomes is a prerequisite for change in teacher beliefs and attitudes. One of the strategies for managing student discipline is a proactive move to involve them in decision-making change in beliefs and attitudes in turn may spur additional changes in practice that further improve student outcomes. This distinction is important because it can be used to shape the design and delivery of maximally effective professional learning opportunities for in-service educators and can be applied to pre-service teacher candidate preparation as well.

▪ *Student Involvement*

Student involvement refers to the quantity and quality of the physical and psychological energy that students invest in the college experience. Such involvement takes many forms, such as absorption in academic work, participation in extracurricular activities, and interaction with faculty and other institutional personnel (Astin, A.W. 2014). students are curious and constantly searching for meaning and stimulation in the school environment. Classes that are too one-dimensional, that fail to involve

students sufficiently, are too challenging, or are content intensive (leaving little room for discussion and consideration), will not satisfy students' curiosities or needs for authentic intellectual stimulation (Guskey, 2002).

▪ **Community Involvement**

The community in which students live may be an asset and contribute to higher school achievement. School-community collaborations such as mentoring, safety patrols, and business partnerships may perk up school programs and affect student feat and attitudes toward school (McPartland & Nettles, 1991; Sanders, 2001; Sanders & Harvey, 2000). Research further suggests that school-community collaborations may help improve student behavior and school safety (Learning First Alliance, 2001). In a study of three urban schools, Sanders (1996) found that school safety was improved when community members were involved with afterschool programs, community patrols to make sure students arrived at school safely, and mentoring at-risk students.

6 Implications of the finding:

The model described above, emphasizing the prevention of behavioral issues through clear expectations, positive relationships, and an inclusive culture, along with responsive strategies and a collaborative approach, has several educational implications.

A positive school climate, fostered by clear expectations and positive relationships, creates an environment conducive to learning. Students are more likely to engage in academic activities when they feel safe, respected, and supported.

SEL skills are essential for academic success, as they enhance students' ability to manage emotions, work collaboratively, and navigate social situations. Social-emotional learning (SEL) is integrated into the curriculum to foster skills such as empathy, communication, and self-awareness. SEL provides students with tools to navigate relationships and conflicts constructively. An inclusive culture promotes diversity and acknowledges the unique strengths and challenges of each student. This fosters an educational environment where all students feel valued and have equal opportunities for learning and growth.

Having a range of responsive strategies allows educators to address behavioral issues promptly and well, minimizing disruptions to the learning process. By addressing issues promptly, the focus can remain on educational goals

Implementing restorative practices supports the development of conflict-resolution skills among students. This contributes to a positive social environment and teaches students how to take responsibility for their actions, promoting personal growth and accountability. school-based restorative programs not only decrease suspensions but also the number of fights and other violent acts (Lewis, 2009), the amount of substance abuse, and the number of police visits to the school. Importantly, restorative practices in schools have also been shown to improve relationships and increase perceptions of safety in those who have experienced harm. It is important to keep evaluating different outcomes, but the early returns are exactly the sorts of outcomes community psychologists focus on and peace activists hope to achieve (Mikhail, 2019)

Involving parents, staff, and students in the disciplinary process fosters a sense of community and shared responsibility. This collaborative approach enhances communication and understanding, creating a supportive network around students that can positively impact their educational experience.

Ongoing professional development for staff ensures that educators are well-equipped with the knowledge and skills needed to implement effective discipline strategies. This contributes to a more competent and responsive teaching staff. There is a need to encourage teachers to avoid becoming coercive in the face of increases in student misbehavior and to rather respond by tranquilly, discussing with students the impact their misbehavior has on others and involving them in some of the decision-making surrounding rules and consequences. If teachers do not, it may mean less student time on task and possibly more extensively, less responsible students (Lewis, 2001). Encouraging a reflective and adaptive approach to discipline promotes continuous progress in teaching practices and disciplinary strategies. Educators can learn from experiences, refine their methods, and adapt to the changing needs of their students and the school community.

Fostering a sense of shared responsibility for maintaining a positive school climate encourages a collaborative effort among all stakeholders. This shared responsibility contributes to a sense of community ownership and investment in the educational process.

7 Conclusion:

This study underscores the critical importance of redefining school discipline to create safe and positive learning environments. Acknowledging the limitations of traditional practices, the ABCs of Positive Behavior model emerges as an innovative and comprehensive framework. It not only prevents behavioral issues through clear expectations, positive relationships, and inclusivity but also provides responsive strategies rooted in self-regulation, fair consequences, and restorative practices. The collaborative involvement of parents, staff, and students fosters shared responsibility, reinforcing a positive school climate. Moreover, the model's commitment to ongoing professional development and a reflective, adaptive approach to discipline promotes continuous improvement. This research contributes theoretical insights and practical recommendations, aiming to guide educators and policymakers toward more effective disciplinary frameworks. Ultimately, the study advocates for an educational landscape where students thrive academically and personally within a nurturing, supportive, and empowering school.

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