School Discipline Programs: Issues and Implications for School Counselors

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Article:

Discipline within schools is becoming an increasing priority. School counselors, together with other education professionals, acknowledge that productive schools need effective discipline programs. Numerous authors have argued that discipline precedes learning in the school environment (Major, 1990; Reyes, 1991). Public opinion polls (Gallup & Elam, 1988) have consistently identified school discipline as a major problem of public education. Baker (1985) suggested that educators must be concerned about the lack of discipline in the schools because an educational environment depends on good discipline. Civil behavior by students is a prerequisite for effective learning and the misbehavior of just one student has the potential to negatively affect an entire class (Baker, 1985).

Discipline models have been developed to provide specific and systematic approaches to managing student behavior both in the classroom and in the larger school environment. Despite widespread use of these discipline models, however, they have generated considerable debate among school counselors and other educators who dispute the benefits versus the "cost" (both financial and possible negative impact on students) of these programs. Although school counselors often function as behavior management consultants, they may need to assume a more prominent role by (a) educating school personnel about discipline models and their potential impact on students, and (b) influencing school-wide decisions about adoption of these programs. This article discusses the role of the school counselor as a consultant on discipline within schools, provides a review of two popular school discipline models, and presents recommendations for practicing school counselors.

SCHOOL COUNSELORS AND SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

Gysbers and Henderson (1988) noted that school counseling programs must be concerned with student competencies, including activities and processes involved in helping students progress in the classroom. Glosoff and Koprowicz (1990) have underscored the importance of "a team approach... to comprehensive school counseling programs" (p. 7) and the role of school counselors as consultants to the members of these teams. In this role, school counselors "work together with teachers and administrators to help create the kind of school environments that stimulate growth and learning" (Glosoff & Koprowicz, 1990, p. 10). Thus, in addition to providing counseling and classroom guidance services, school counselors help to create growth-enhancing school environments by serving as consultants to classroom teachers, administrators, parents, and community members (Glosoff & Koprowicz, 1990).

Within schools, the discipline process has great potential for affecting, both positively and negatively, not only student behavior, but also such critical areas as attitudes, self-concept, and self-esteem. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA; 1989) has adopted the position that "the school counselor should urge school districts to develop [discipline] policies which [not only] clearly distinguish the role of the counselor... [but also] promote the use of the school counselor as a resource person" (p. 5), and has defined an effective school as one that "promotes the idea of students developing a responsibility for self and controlling their own behavior" (p. 5). This position statement clearly recognizes the potential impact of disciplinary procedures on the overall development of students and emphasizes the need for school counselors "to be involved in helping to create

effective behavior change" in the school environment (ASCA, 1989, p. 5). As key members of student services teams, then, school counselors must explore their roles in the discipline process and serve as consultants to school personnel on all aspects of managing student behavior (Stickel, Satchwell, & Meyer, 1991). A systematic approach to discipline, then, can be viewed as one dimension of a total learning environment designed to impact on both cognitive and affective aspects of child development. Cobb and Richards (1983) found that school counselors, working in collaboration with classroom teachers, could be critical resources for helping teachers develop their skills for managing behavior problems in the classroom. Research on various classroom discipline models indicates that teachers demonstrate functional changes in their approach to discipline as a result of training (Emmer, 1986)--training that can be provided by school counselors. Further, Strein and French (1984) have found that teachers' abilities to implement effective disciplinary methods and to teach self-control in the classroom are important factors in facilitating the affective development of students. School counselors, by providing consultation, information, and training about approaches to school discipline, can effectively promote affective development of students through intervening at a "system level" with teachers and administrators.

OVERVIEW OF SCHOOL DISCIPLINE PROGRAMS

To address the need for effective management of student behavior in schools, a number of packaged discipline models have been developed and marketed. These discipline models attempt to provide comprehensive and systematic approaches that can be implemented effectively and consistently by all personnel within the school. Curwin and Mendler (1989) have proposed categorizing discipline programs as either Obedience or Responsibility Models. This categorization is consistent with the evolution of school discipline practices from traditionally punitive models to models based on reeducation of students (Waterland, 1971).

Obedience Models are based on the premise that telling students what to do is permissible and that punishment is an effective intervention for misbehavior (Curwin & Mendler, 1989). Children learn that rules are important and that there are consequences for breaking rules. Teachers are instructed to adhere to rules set forth in the model and to be consistent in applying guidelines established in the program. Canter's (1976,1979) Assertive Discipline model, probably the most widely used Obedience Model, provides an approach to discipline characterized by assertive teacher behavior, rules, and consequences (Steere, 1988). Specifically, Assertive Discipline trains teachers to a) set clear behavioral limits and establish consequences for students, b) provide consistent follow-through, and c) reward appropriate behavior (Moles, 1990). Between 1975 and 1990, more than 800,000 teachers were estimated to have received training in Assertive Discipline (Hill, 1990). William Glasser (1969; 1986) is widely recognized as the father of the Responsibility Model approach to school discipline. Glasser's Reality Therapy and Control Theory stress student responsibility for choices that determine personal success or failure. Effective implementation of this model requires the collaborative efforts of students, teachers, and counselors in regulating student behavior. School counselors and teachers are encouraged to develop personal relationships with their students, listen to them, and impart a feeling of self-worth and dignity. When disruptive outbursts do occur, students are helped to identify their behavior and make value judgments about its appropriateness. Responsibility Models focus on helping students to accept personal responsibility for their behavior.

Although both Assertive Discipline and Reality Therapy developed as outgrowths of the behavior modification and human relations models, some critical differences exist between these two models. The primary theoretical difference is in who has responsibility for managing students' behavior. In Assertive Discipline, the teacher establishes standards and has a right to assert that students conform to these standards (Grossman, 1990). Reality Therapy views students as being in control of their behavior and making choices about whether to behave appropriately (Grossman, 1990). The role of teachers and counselors, then, is to help students make better choices about their behavior.

Assertive Discipline has a much stronger behavior modification emphasis, with a greater focus on students' behavior and the resulting consequences (both positive and negative). In contrast, Responsibility Models stress the importance of relationships between students and their teachers or counselors, along with students making

value judgments about the appropriateness of behavior. In addition, Responsibility Models emphasize the importance of students taking responsibility for their own behaviors and choices rather than relying on external factors (e.g., punishment and highly structured environments) to regulate their behavior in the school environment. Obedience Models, such as Canter's (1976; 1979), provide an institutionalized structure for discipline that imposes clear and predetermined consequences for behavior.

Although schools across the country are adopting packaged discipline approaches, studies have not clearly established their impact on such critical areas as students' attitudes toward school, self-concept, and self-esteem. Research (e.g., Dobson, 1977; Gartrell, 1987) has indicated that the fundamental attitudes toward the learning process, school, and peers that children develop in the primary grades have a long-lasting impact on the child's success as a student. Although both Obedience and Responsibility Models can be effective in controlling children's behavior in schools, there is insufficient research to date to support such widespread use of these models. There exists the danger that discipline will be valued for its own sake without regard for the effects of these programs on the overall learning and development of children.

Research findings from studies of both Obedience and Responsibility discipline models have been far from conclusive and generally have failed to compare different disciplinary approaches. For example, Render, Padilla, & Krank, (1989) found only 16 studies that examined the impact of Assertive Discipline programs in the schools and characterized much of this research as relatively unsophisticated. Further, Hill (1990) suggested that Assertive Discipline could be detrimental to children in their formative years, contending that the rigid structure of these programs fails to allow for the normal developmental activities of young children. Research on responsibility-based approaches to school discipline (e.g., Mattaliano, 1980; Poppen, Thompson, Cates, & Gang, 1976) has identified a number of positive outcomes, including improved learning, more positive school climate, and fewer discipline problems. Yet, there are many questions still unanswered about the relationship between these different approaches to school discipline and children's development of positive attitudes about school, their peers, and themselves. Additional outcome research is essential if we are to fully understand how discipline approaches can be effective not only for controlling behavior but also for enhancing and promoting individual development.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOL COUNSELORS

School counselors, trained in preventive programming, can be essential resources for teachers and administrators who wish to learn strategies for creating classroom and school environments more conducive to fostering the affective growth of students. For example, Knoff (1985) developed a successful model for an in-service discipline training program in which school counselors served as consultants to help school staff assess their knowledge and attitudes about behavior problems, to examine their own philosophies and styles of discipline, to learn about other disciplinary approaches and programs, and to develop and evaluate disciplinary interventions. This approach emphasized the role of the school counselor in intervening with school staff to educate them about all aspects of school discipline programs, not just the behavior management component. School counselors can play a critical role in addressing the real need for more effective approaches to discipline in the schools. Recommended actions for school counselors include the following:

1. Develop knowledge and skills in coping with problem behaviors--not only in the classroom, but in all areas of the school.

2. Actively become involved in the adoption or development of schoolwide discipline policies and programs by consulting with teachers and administrators to educate them about a) the potential effects of these programs on student developmental and educational outcomes, b) the inconclusive research evidence to support use of such programs, and c) the possible differential impact of these programs on students at different developmental levels.

3. Consult with teachers who are trying to create more effective approaches to classroom discipline as well as with those who are struggling to respond to existing behavior problems. A secondary benefit of these

consultations is that the school counselor systematically may examine the effectiveness of various discipline approaches and use this information as an additional resource for other teachers.

   4. Explore, develop, and implement classroom guidance and small group activities, as well as individual and group counseling interventions, that can help students to better understand and adjust to classroom rules and expectations for behavior.

   5. Research and document the effectiveness of disciplinary programs in the schools and evaluate the impact of these programs on students and their learning environment.

   6. Assist teachers and administrators to consider how they can incorporate elements of more than one disciplinary model or approach to best meet the needs of their students and their own styles.

   7. Encourage educators to involve students in making decisions about disciplinary approaches and policies. This increases student "ownership" of the resulting programs and fosters a greater sense of responsibility for behaviors and their consequences.

CONCLUSION
School counselors--as counselors, consultants, and experts on developmental needs of students--are critical personnel in efforts to create effective school environments. Discipline programs increasingly are being viewed as packaged solutions to the multitude of problems faced in improving our schools. The real solutions to school discipline problems, however, are complex and multifaceted. School counselors can serve as internal consultants to educate school staff about various aspects of discipline and alternative approaches. In this way, school counselors can extend their positive impact on students by influencing the total school climate.

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