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Effects of School-wide Positive Behavior Support Programs on Teacher Morale

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Abstract

The effect of School Wide Positive Behavior Support (SW-PBS) on teacher morale was examined using the Purdue Teacher Opinionnaire (PTO). Faculty members of two rural Tennessee middle schools participated. The treatment group experienced initial implementation of a SW-PBS program and was both pretested and posttested. The middle school where the control group taught was posttested without implementation of SW-PBS. A paired t-test was applied to analyze the data, showing improvements at a significance level of .05 in the factors of facilities, rapport with the principal, and community pressures. Findings suggest that teachers are likely to have increased levels of morale relating to these three factors when a SW-PBS program is implemented.

Keywords: teacher morale, school wide positive behavior support, student conduct, social learning theory

The Effect on Teacher Morale of a School-wide Positive Behavior Support Program

The implementation of a School-wide Positive Behavior Support (SW-PBS) program requires a commitment from the administration and the faculty who realize that a proactive approach to school discipline provides an enhanced setting in which teaching and learning are able to occur at a higher level (Shogren, Faggella-Luby, Bae, & Wehmeyer, 2004). Little research, however, has occurred within the SW-PBS movement regarding the effect of the implementation of such a program on teacher morale. Extant research examined effects on other factors, such as student achievement, on-task behavior, and the trends within the tracked behaviors. This present study focuses on the effects of the integration of a SW-PBS program on teacher morale within a Title I middle school in rural east Tennessee.

Teacher morale encompasses the overall spirit with which faculty members approach their profession, and the factors influencing teacher morale predict the effectiveness of the teaching and learning within schools. For instance, Mani and Devi (2010) found that high faculty morale indicated an increase in student achievement while low levels of morale led to decreased teacher productivity and increased teacher burnout. Teachers with lower morale demonstrated a detachment from students, decreased quality of teaching, greater use of sick leave, and a dehumanized perception of students.

Social learning theory serves as a theoretical framework both for the development of teacher morale (Bledow & Frese, 2009) and for SW-PBS (Ross & Horner, 2007). The foundation on which Colvin, G., Kameenui and Sugai (1993) proposed the SW-PBS program involves an application of social learning theory with an emphasis on creating a three-tiered system where behavioral expectations are clearly defined, proactively demonstrated and taught, and consistently and persistently acknowledged and monitored within the school.

Teaching and learning within schools are often disrupted by problem behaviors. The SW-PBS proffers a solution to this dilemma with an emphasis on the integration of measurable outcomes, data based decisions for evidence-based practices, and an overt supportive system from the administration for the classroom teacher. The goal is to provide a comprehensive and sustainable tactic for school-based operations with the objective of reshaping disciplinary practices within a school community (Safran & Oswald, 2003). The variables involved within this reshaping process involve the altering of views of the disorders within the school community. The SW-PBS framework seeks a holistic approach to the positive, collaborative process for establishing common definitions of behavioral expectations. The broader perspective is to establish a safer and more positive school environment.

Sugai and Horner (2006) note the concern of professional educators regarding problem behaviors that interrupt the overall learning process. The sustained practice of behavioral interventions presents the issue of widespread inconsistency. Alternatively, the SW-PBS movement underscores the need for an integrated approach through a comprehensive system of measureable outcomes, data-driven decisions, evidence-based practices, and an overt support base for the high fidelity implementation of the SW-PBS program from those implementing the program. All of these factors lead to a system level of durable and effective school-based interventions which are proactive in their approach to addressing behavioral challenges within a school or system.

The current status of research within the SW-PBS movement reflects a growing interest and success level for school-based operations. The research tends to revolve around high school, elementary or behaviorally disturbed pupils. The middle school level, particularly rural students are often relegated to the outer realms of most research. The research on Title I schools remains

primarily centered on urban issues, which may share some similar concerns with rural school, but fails to address the current situational factors and trends facing rural Title I schools. This review illustrates a gap within the current literature and research for middle, rural, and Title I schools.

The primary investigated question for this study was as follows: "Did the implementation of SW-PBS have a significant effect on the morale of the teachers?" A null hypothesis was developed for each of the nine factors influencing teach morale as listed below: "There will be no significant difference between the teacher opinions of each factor between the two schools after the implementation of SW-PBS."

1. Rapport with the principal

2. Satisfaction with teaching as a career

3. Salary

4. Teaching load

5. Curriculum issues

6. Status

7. Community support for education

8. School facilities and services

9. Community pressures

Method

Participants

The two public Tennessee middle schools whose faculty members participated in this study had student populations of similar size. Middle School 1 (MS1), the treatment group, had a population of 511 sixth through eighth grade students. Middle School 2 (MS2) had a

population of 498. Both were located in rural settings and were Title I schools. Both student

populations were similar demographically with 95% being Caucasian and the remaining equal

portions of African American, Asian, and Native American students. MS1 had 77% of the

students eligible for free or reduced lunches while MS2, the control school, had 74%. With MS1

15% of the students were classified as having disabilities while MS2 had 16%. Each school

possessed the same 1% of English Language Learners. The students of both schools generally

represented families on the lower level of the socioeconomic status as determined by the Title I

status of the schools. Both schools were accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and

Schools and met adequate yearly progress (AYP) for the 2008-2009 academic year. MS1

implemented a SW-PBS program in 2009-2010 while MS2 did not have such a program.

Within each school the demographics of the faculty were similar. Both schools had a

faculty that was 100% Caucasian. MS1 had a faculty that was 60% male and 40% female, while

MS2 had a faculty of 30% male and 70% female. Under the federal No Child Left Behind

legislation, MS1's faculty was 95% highly qualified and MS2's faculty was 90% highly

qualified. The breakdown of years of teaching experience with each faculty varied. The average

number of years teaching experience for MS1 was 15.7 years with an average tenure at the

school of 8.4 years, while MS2 averaged 18.2 years of experience and tenure at the school of 7.1

years.

Instrument

The instrument used to measure teacher morale was the Purdue Teacher Opinionnaire

(PTO). The PTO was chosen because of its extensive history of usage, which provides an

excellent level of reliability, and the high validity level of the instrument. The PTO was normed

using a sample of 3,023 teachers from 60 high schools in Indiana through a stratified random

sample and 16 schools in Oregon (Lester & Bishop, 2000). The testing and retesting of the instrument reported high levels of reliability in several relationships within schools. Among these relationships included teacher rapport with the principal at 0.88, satisfaction with teaching at 0.84, and teacher status at 0.81. The correlations ranged from 0.62 in community pressures to 0.88 for teacher rapport with the principal. The median correlation was 0.87.

Procedure

The results of the pretest and posttest using the Purdue Teacher Opinionnaire (PTO) were analyzed using a two-tailed t-test to determine whether there existed a statistically significant difference between the two tests at MS1 while using MS2 as the control group. The mean scores from the surveys for the faculty from MS1 were analyzed against the mean scores from the surveys for the faculty from MS2 to determine whether there was a significant change over the year of implementation of SW-PBS. The degrees of freedom (df) within the t-test were determined by the number of participants, while the level of significance (p) would be set at $p = 0.05$ (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorenson, 2006). Should the results of the t-test exceed the level of significance, $p > 0.05$, the null hypothesis (H_o) for that research question would be rejected.

Once the mean scores for each of the surveys were calculated, a paired t-test analysis was conducted from the MS1 faculty for the pretest in order to ensure normality of the responses. Box plots were chosen as the means for displaying this normalcy (see Figure 1). The choice to utilize the differences between the means of the responses for each PTO item provided an opportunity to account for the range within the demographics of tenure at the school and within the profession, level of education, and familiarity with MS1's operations. The mean scores of the two posttests for MS1 and MS2 were compared using the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test as the samples were small for some of the factors.

Results

The PTO results for each item within the PTO were averaged to obtain a mean for each of the 100 items. The resultant means from the PTO for each school were reordered and then grouped into categories by factor in order to facilitate entry into the statistical software. A new variable was created to account for the differences between the MS1 pretest and posttest resultant means. This variable, Diff, was analyzed in preparation for the tests of each factor. The resultant new listing of items for MS1, including the Diff, was examined using a paired t-test on MS1's pretest and posttest to ensure normalcy of responses. The results indicated, with the exception of Teaching Load and Community Pressures, that all categories were normally distributed (see Table 1). The paired t-tests the other 'Diff' variables using a significance level of .05 to examine whether there is a statistically significant difference under the introduction of the SWPBS program. Significant improvements were noted in the factors of Facilities, Rapport with the Principal, and Community (see Table 2). While some of the 'Diff' appear skewed, those associated with Load and Community Pressure, the non parametric Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test was utilized. The Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test is appropriate because of the small number of the sample under these other factors. Using the Wilcoxon Signed Rank test provided a significant improvement using the significance level of .05. The differences for Teaching Load and Community Pressure were statistically significant at the level of .05 for MS1. We also checked for normalcy of responses from each school using parallel box plots as a condition for statistical testing (see Figure 1). Normalcy was indicated for Rapport, Satisfaction, Salary, Curriculum, and Status when using the Welch Two sample t-test. However, the factors of Community, Facilities, and Pressure do not indicate normalcy, but show skewed results of responses within the parallel box plots. Correction factors for continuity were then applied under the Welch Two Sample test

Table 1

Factor	V	p-value
Load	57	0.018929
Pressure	15	0.03125

Table 2

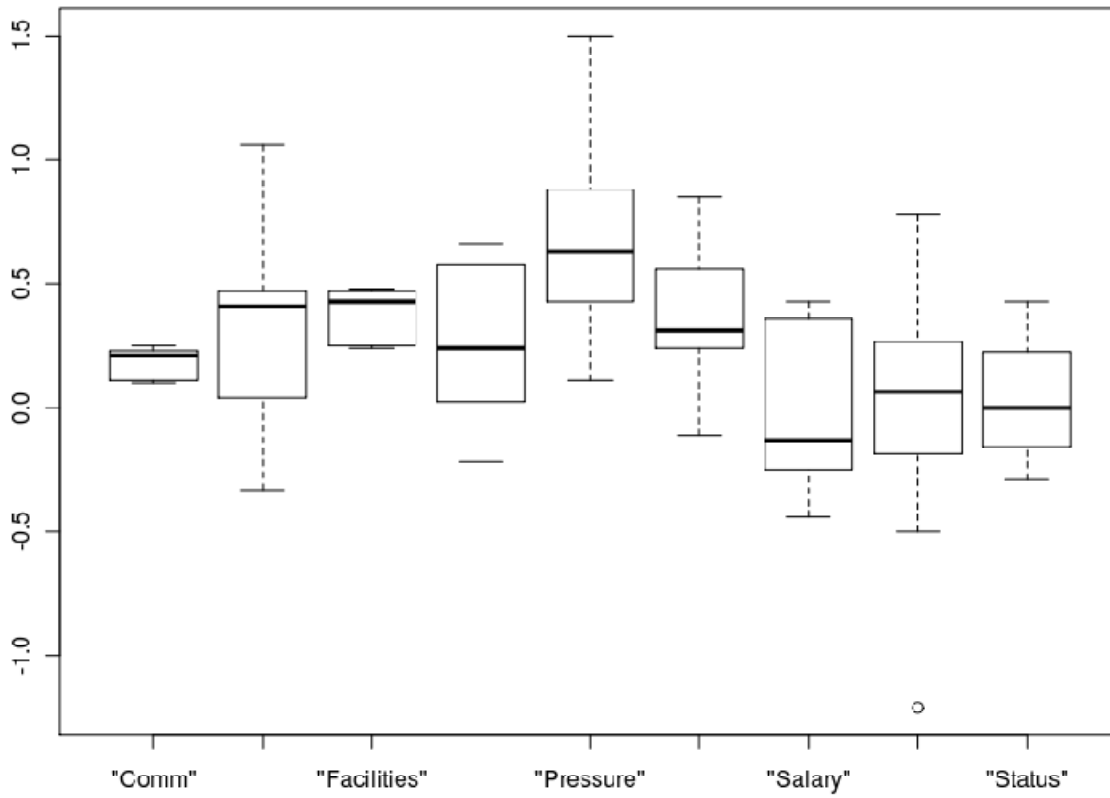| Factors	T result	Df	P=value	Mean of x
Rapport	6.5214	18	1.972e-06	0.2839792
Satisfaction	0.3109	19	0.3796	0.0305
Salary	0.0823	6	0.4685	0.01142857
Curriculum	1.421	4	0.1142	0.33
Status	0.3763	7	0.3589	0.3375
Community	5.7499	4	0.002268	0.18
Facilities	7.0106	4	0.001090	0.374

Figure 1

to identify the levels of significance. Curriculum and Facilities were the two factors for which there were statistically significant differences between the two schools.

Discussion

The project sought to determine whether a statistically significant difference occurs in faculty morale between two rural Title I Middle Schools when SW-PBS is introduced. The examination of the factors affecting teacher morale was conducted using the results from the PTO. The results were inspected for normalcy as one of the conditions for statistical analyses. Several factors' responses were found not to have normal responses, but demonstrated skewed results. Correction factors for these skewed results we installed prior to statistical analyses. Some of the factors were found to have statistically significant differences. These factors included the Facilities and the Curriculum. Factors which did not indicate a statistically significant difference between the two schools' responses included Rapport, Satisfaction, Load, and Salary. However, there were statistically significant differences in five of the nine factors when reviewed longitudinally within MS1. These significant differences occurred within the factors of Facilities, Rapport, Community, Load, and Pressure. Therefore, the hypotheses regarding the significant improvements within the factors of Facilities and Curriculum are supported when comparing MS1 with MS2.

While factors affecting teacher morale must be examined to determine whether their contribution to the overall teacher morale is significant, the value placed on each factors varies according to the individual teacher and their personal value placed on each factors. This equation, which is often hard to quantify, exists more in a dynamic and qualitative nature within each individual. However, these nine factors demonstrate the current status of educational leadership in assessing, evaluating, and managing the overall synopsis for school or district.

This need arises from the collective perceptions of the value placed on teachers within a school or district (Ross & Horner, 2007). "The status of the teacher reflects the socio-cultural ethos of a society" (Mani & Devi, 2010). The value placed on teacher morale indicates leadership's ability effectively to identify the processes and procedures needed to effectively communicate with the faculty and stakeholders to address change, conflict management, and decision making.

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