

Advancing the concept of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support

Along with the current acceptance of PBIS idea comes ways to make it even better. This analysis intends to provide such Alternative Propositions to make sure PBIS leadership and school personnel constantly critique the concept and its processes so that it does not become manipulative, patronizing, or colonial.

PBIS builds a school's capacity for implementing a hierarchical three-tiered system that differentiates students based on educational, social, emotional and behavioral support needs in order to improve effectiveness, efficiency, and equity for all students. (PBIS, 2018).

PBIS students learn about behavior, just as they learn other subjects like math or science:

- Helps encourage good behavior/school safety
- Improves social, emotional and academics outcomes for all students
- Emphasizes prevention, not punishment
- Believes every child can learn proper behavior (Lee, 2018)

Democracy and school/classroom discipline: Moving from behavioral models to cognitive models

Moral development not behavior modification: The influence of democracy on school discipline

Alternative proposition: research suggests using democratic practices in schools teaches children the values of respect and responsibility. One would assume a democracy would use democratic-oriented discipline approaches. *The challenge to educators is to not control students through external reward...,but to create that democratic [school]society in which individuals make choices for the common good of whole group* (Colville-Hall, 2000).

Grandmont's (2002) study of 5 public schools reveals implementing democratic discipline on a school-wide basis and democratic classroom management improves student behavior and encourages autonomy and responsibility. Students felt respected and staff more prepared to deal with discipline. Both had less stress.

Alternative suggestion: create an ethos of democracy in public schools Gathercoal (2000) suggests the use of Democratic Class Meetings to provide students with a sense of value and belonging. Here students share power and avoid power struggles because each student is provided with a school-supported opportunity to express concerns and satisfactions in a fair and equitable manner (Styles, 2001). Feeling they have some power in the organization/operation of their class, students are less likely to "act out" and more likely to support actions derived from shared decisions. Students are more likely to obey rules they help create.

Behavior modification does little to meet Glasser's intrinsic "basic human needs" (freedom, love, belonging, power, and fun) which are best met when students share in school/classroom decisions that affect them.

Empowering PBIS: Advancing students from outer directed to inner directed persons:

Moving the locus of control from the school to within the student

PBIS seeks to reduce or eliminate poor behavior school-wide through the encouragement and guidance from adults and rewarding positive behaviors.

Alternative proposition: what happens when students leave school and those giving the directions and rewards are not around? I don't see in the literature where PBIS works to eventually free students from the dependency on the positive reinforcement upon which the concept is based.

Alternative suggestion: make sure students understand the concepts of inner and outer directed people *Inner-directed persons* are guided by internalized values rather than external pressures. They feel they largely determine their destinies by inner characteristics, attitudes, and resources they develop during their lifetime. *Other-/Outer-direct persons* are guided by a set of values derived from current trends or outward influences rather than from within oneself. They feel they are governed by their environment, institutions, organizations, people, circumstances, and situations in which they happen to find themselves.

Alternative suggestion: make sure students understand the concept of locus of control

In personality psychology, locus of control is the degree to which people believe that they have control over the outcome of events in their lives, as opposed to external forces beyond their control.

People who develop an **internal locus of control** believe that they are responsible for their own success. Those with an **external locus of control** believe that external forces, like luck, determine their outcomes

Alternative proposition: does PBIS tell students they will slowly be weaned from the reinforcement? If and when does the locus of control move from the adults at school and become the student's?

Alternative suggestion: involve children from the beginning in understanding the PBIS idea/process

Let students see the big picture in that progress comes as they become more inner-directed, and that they know

the goal of PBIS is moving the external locus of control situated in the school and its adults to an internal locus of control they will carry with them regardless of where they are and who they are with.

Alternative suggestion: give students critical thinking skills and community activist/change agent skills
To the extent that despite being inner-directed or having an internal locus of control which makes such a person responsible for their destiny, there are basic inherent barriers/external forces (systemic racism, ableism, sexism, patriarchy, ageism) stifling the actualization of this destiny. Thus, students must be prepared to dismantle these systems, countering the tendency to take responsibility for not having pulled themselves up by their bootstraps.

De-colonized PBIS: Critical thinking for liberation

Alternative proposition: educator Paulo Freire notes, “Education is never neutral; it either colonizes or liberates. It either intends to fit students into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it helps students prepare to deal critically/creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.” If this is true, PBIS advocates must review the purpose of schools in a pluralistic multicultural democratic republic.

Alternative suggestion: make sure practitioners of PBIS name and unsettle colonial spaces in public schools. Such spaces confuse education with assimilation/conformity. In these place the onus of change is forever on the colonized (urban students of color/poor whites). Thus, ways of being, seeing the world, and defining values for these students will endlessly revolve around ways to succeed on another’s terms, rather than around sustaining and nurturing their own practices and criteria for success and achievement.

PBIS as it is widely construed will remain colonial until it unsettles and deconstructs colonial epistemologies (the norms, logic, values, and way of knowing) while foregrounding epistemologies reflective of urban youth and the wisdom of their community.

Transformational PBIS: Re-examining resistance as oppositional behavior

Alternative proposition: influential work on oppositional culture explaining urban students’ disadvantage comes as the result of a culture that discourages academic effort by branding it as “acting white” and leading students to resist schooling.

Alternative suggestion: the issue is not that African American students have to act white to be successful, the issue is they can’t act black and be successful

A. A. Akom suggests some students have valid reasons for their disruptions, and so all oppositional behavior cannot be considered inappropriate or “bad.” This pushes educators to make such opposition transformational, challenging the school to respect students’ critique of the public education system and provide them and their peers ways to make their concerns improve/transform the school and become a part of the school’s ethos.

Advancing the core values of PBIS

Alternative proposition: one of the main characteristics of PBIS is the school’s core values practiced by everyone and positively reinforced. Some of the more common values are respect, responsibility, reliability, tolerance, safety, caring, respect, fairness—all established school-wide so students grow up to be socially-emotionally well rounded individuals who know how to conduct themselves in the real-world.

Alternative suggestion: reflecting on the above discussion and Alternative suggestions, it is suggested schools/communities consider added self-determination, whole-school shared decision-making (education for critical citizenship)/student voice, de-colonialization, and critical thinking to their school’s list of core values.

Additional readings and references

- Wilson, A. (2015). A Critique of Socio-cultural Values in PBIS. Behavior Analysis in Practice. Association for Behavioral Analysis International, 8(1), 92–94. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5048255/>
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- https://www.academia.edu/2254440/Reexamining_Resistance_as_Oppositional_Behavior_The_Nation_of_Islam_and_the_Creation_of_a_Black_Achievement_Ideology by AA Akom
- Antecedents and Outcomes of Perceived Locus of Causality: An Application of Self-Determination Theory
- https://business.missouri.edu/sites/default/files/publication/turban_tan_brown_sheldon_2007_jasp.pdf