The Effect of Mentoring Relationships on Negative Office Referrals

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Table of Contents

List of Tables

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine is mentoring relationships, specifically the implementation of the Check In Check Out program, would decrease negative behavior in students. The measurement tool used in this study was the county recorded office referrals, tracked over the course of three quarters of the school year. The study used a quasi-experimental design where 12 students were chosen based on their office referrals in Quarter 1 to participate in the mentoring program. Although further study of the Check In Check Out program is necessary, this study showed that it did have a strong impact on decreasing the number of office referrals the participating students earned in the two quarters of implementation.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

As a teacher, one must constantly invent and reinvent ways to best reach his or her students and foster success. As a teacher in a high poverty area, those methods are not always directly related to curriculum and instruction. We know that we must meet students on a social and emotional level in order to reach them academically. Dealing with negative behavior is a part of any teacher's job. However, in a Title 1 School, this often becomes a major priority. A Title 1 Schools is a school that receives federal government funding due to high levels of poverty.

I will be Ready. I will be Safe. I will be Respectful. I will be Responsible. I will be Accountable. This is the mantra of the students and staff at Edgewood Elementary School. Recited each morning as part of the pledge, displayed in classrooms and in hallways, written on forms and referrals, it is clear that these are the expectations for all students who attend the school. However, following these "school norms" is more challenging for some students than others. Those students who struggle to follow these norms often receive consequences, which can eventually lead to negative office referrals. As will be described in the literature review portion of this study, negative office referrals are strongly correlated to things like poor academic success, negative views about school, suspensions, expulsions, dropout rates, and even prison time.

Edgewood Elementary School is a school in crisis. With office referrals numbering yearly in the hundreds, limiting these referrals is a challenging but necessary goal. Upon looking at the data, it was found that 90% of the schools' referrals come from less than 5% of the population of students. It is clear that this was not an issue affecting the majority of students, but rather a small group, and that any possible interventions would need to be directed to this

specific group rather than a school wide initiative. After brainstorming many possible solutions, and through the Literature Review process, the researcher, along with the school's Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) Team decided upon a mentoring program, well known in the PBIS world, called Check In Check Out. This intervention is a one-on-one mentoring program that pairs students with behavior issues to caring adults in the school building. The intervention requires a morning Check In meeting and an afternoon Check Out meeting. Within these meetings, not only is a personal relationship forged, but goals are set and monitored, successes are celebrated, and needs are discussed.

Statement of Problem

With research detailing the negative effects of office referrals and suspensions, it is clear that limiting these occurrences must be a top priority. The school discussed in this study has determined that it will use the Check In Check Out Mentoring Intervention to enact a change in their office referral data. The purpose of this study is to determine if the intervention affects the occurrence of office referrals in the targeted students.

Hypothesis

Null Hypothesis: The Check In Check Out program will have no effect on office referrals in the targeted group. There will be no significant change in the number of office referrals from the time period prior to the intervention of Check In Check Out to the time period after the completion of the intervention.

Operational Definitions

A ***Check in Check Out Program*** is a Tier 3 PBIS intervention, which aims to pair students not meeting behavioral or academic expectations with caring adults in their school

building. The program requires morning and afternoon meetings as well as goal setting and tracking.

An *Intervention* is an academic or behavioral program above and beyond the regular school program for those students who are not meeting current expectations. The goal of an intervention is to show academic or behavioral improvement.

A *Negative Office Referral* a written document required if a student is sent to the office for disruptive, dangerous, or inappropriate behavior.

PBIS stands for Positive Behavioral Supports and Interventions. This is a nationwide program that provides research-based interventions and management tools to support and improve the effectiveness of schools.

Red Zone Students is a term for the 5% of students receiving the most office referrals in the school. These students are the targets of Tier 3 interventions.

Tiers 1, 2, 3 are levels of supports and services within the PBIS program. Tier 1 targets 80% of the school population, Tier 2 targets the 15% who do not respond to Tier 1 interventions, and Tier 3 targets the 5% who do not respond to Tier 1 and 2 interventions.

A *Title 1 School* is a school receiving government funding in order to help students achieve educational goals. Title 1 Schools are defined on the number of low-income students enrolled.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Overview

This literature review seeks to explore the topic of behavior in Elementary Schools. Included in the review are common behaviors in elementary schools, poverty and its possible link to behavior problems, the effects of poor behavior in school, and possible interventions that can help break the cycle of poor behavior and its effects on later life.

Behavior Issues in Elementary School

It comes as no surprise that student behavior is a concern in schools across the United States. A report on youth violence released by the Office of the Surgeon General suggests that the number of students displaying problem behaviors in schools is on the rise (Barber, 2013). This report also discussed the correlation of poor school performance and their potential to be at risk for violent behaviors later in life. Instances of behavior issues are an utmost priority because it not only disrupts the school day for both teachers and students, but can also lead to school failure, increased drop out rates, and the likelihood of incarceration later in life.

The most common sources of office referrals in elementary schools are for defiance or disrespect, disruption to the classroom, and physical aggression (Gion, McIntosh & Horner, 2014). Students who are habitual office referral receivers are often officially labeled "red-zone" students or "frequent flyers" and unofficially labeled "bad." Kennedy-Lewis and Murphy (2016) detail this labeling process and its potential consequences in a 2016 study of students who receive multiple suspensions and office referrals. The students often felt that teachers and school staff considered their "badness" a personality trait, a part of who they are. They also felt that their previous transactions and punishments made their new teachers assume their "badness."

Kennedy-Lewis and Murphy believed that the students then took on the actions and attitudes of "the bad student" because that was what was expected of them. The researchers also stated the clear assumption that this could have a negative effect on their future school experiences. Students who begin displaying this type of behavior in early elementary school are not only more likely to develop more serious behavior issues later in schooling but are also more likely to repeat a grade level and to be labeled as special needs (Thomas, Bierman, Thompson & Powers, 2008).

Effects of Poor Behavior in School

Students who start out on this path are more likely to experience poor academic success, likelihood of future violence, suspensions and expulsion, higher dropout rates, and the likelihood of drug and alcohol abuse (Collins, O'Connor, Supplee & Shaw, 2017). This study also discusses poverty as a cause for many of the mentioned problems and says this especially affects low-income boys. Children raised in low-income households are more likely to experience stressors such as poor living conditions, single parenting, unstable family lives, and inadequate childcare resources. Children living in poverty are more likely to experience trauma and have limited access to health care. It is clear that these issues are at play in the eventual behavior issues displayed at school.

One incredibly unfortunate relationship displayed here is the one between school disciplinary action and imprisonment later in life. Henderson and Guy (2017) discuss this issue as a problem with social connectedness. Once students are suspended or expelled, or otherwise experience time where they are removed from the classroom for prolonged periods of time, they establish a feeling of disconnectedness from the classroom. This disconnectedness prevents students from accessing important school relationships and other academic and social support

and makes them more likely to continue this cycle of behavior. Henderson and Guy also draw attention to the fact that students of color, especially male students of color, are referred, suspended, and expelled at a disproportionate rate from their white and female counterparts.

The "school to prison pipeline" is a metaphorical term used to describe the link between school behavior issues and later incarceration. The pipeline starts when school administrators and teachers push children out of the school system by placing them on out-of-school suspension, transferring them to alternative schools, expelling them, or having them arrested for minor offenses (Scully, 2015.) Scully argues that a no tolerance policy in schools, matched with increased pressure for school achievement, encourages teachers and administrators to eliminate low-performing students by suspending them, transferring them to alternative programs, or expelling them. All of these issues make these students far more likely to wind up in prison later in life. There are intense and important racial and social issues to be discussed within the confines of this subject; however, that is not the specific goal of this literature review. This review aims to simply show that there is indeed a link between school behavior and later imprisonment.

Intervention

It must be a school's goal to break this vicious cycle for its students. One way that schools are attempting this is by utilizing a system called PBIS, or Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. Ogulmus and Vuran (2016) describe PBIS as a system whose main aim is to ensure behavioral success and therefore academic achievement of students in schools. PBIS focuses on interventions in order to meet the social behavioral demands of schools. The PBIS system relies on a three-tiered model. Tier 1 affects all students in all settings and targets 75-85% of the students in a school. Tier 2 targets a more selected group of students, 10-15% of

students, and aims to reduce occurrences of problematic behavior. Finally, Tier 3 is individualized intervention for students who display more intense behaviors. Less than 5% of students fall into this category. These researchers also state that the key components that add to PBIS's success are its focus upon establishing a positive atmosphere and developing positive student-staff relationships and its reliance on explicitly teaching expectations and utilizing stablished programming to do so. Parker, Nelson, and Burns (2010) said that "practices within schools, however, can either increase or decrease the likelihood of problem behaviors. An environment characterized by aggression and disruption can elicit cyclical recurrences of inappropriate behavior, whereas other system-wide practices can elicit appropriate behaviors and diminish problem behaviors" (p. 817). One of the biggest pushes of the PBIS system is promoting positive staff-student relationships. The school, in combination with the relationships students establish with adults and peers, serves as a vital social institution in youth development (Henderson & Guy, 2017).

Check-In Check-Out Mentoring Program

One specific intervention that has been shown to increase positive staff-student relationships, and through those relationships reduce negative behavior, is the Check-in Check Out mentoring program, which will be referred to as CICO. CICO is one of the most widely implemented Tier 2 interventions, with over 3,000 schools across the country formally using the CICO database to document progress for students receiving the intervention (Hawken, Bundock, Kladis, O'Keeffe & Barrett (2014). This number does not take into account all of the schools using the CICO without formally documenting. CICO is a Tier 2 PBIS intervention created to increase feedback and positive adult attention (Hawken, MacLeod & Rawlings (2007). CICO is also praised in the article for being "efficient (i.e. students receive support shortly after being

identified) and cost effective to implement (i.e. similar procedures are used with a group of students without a large amount of staff time to implement)" (p. 636). As with all Tier 2 systems, CICO is created for those students who are not responding to primary level preventative efforts. Students are referred to the program by teachers, parents, or other school staff (Hawken et al., 2007). Many schools use office referral data as a qualification for the program and also use this data to determine the success of the program for a specific child (Barber, 2013). Some of the primary benefits noted about the CICO program are an increase in obtaining appropriate goals and behaviors, increased daily and weekly amount of adult feedback, a more structured daily schedule for students, and improvement by the school at providing feedback to families with respect to the students' behavior goals. Barber details the program in the following way:

> (a) students "check-in" with an adult (the CICO coordinator) in the morning, receive their daily report card (DRC; also referred to as a daily point card), and reviews the day's expectations; (b) students receive ongoing feedback from teachers/staff throughout the   day; (c) students "check-out" in the afternoon and review their DRC with the CICO coordinator, discussing the level of success; and (d) a summary of the DRC, or the DRC itself, is sent home for parents to sign and return the following day. (p. 2)

Overall, each of the reviewed articles claimed an overall positive response from the participants and a general decrease in office referrals. Collins et al. (2017) say that teacher–child relationships are central to children's socio-emotional and behavioral development during elementary school. They go on to describe a high-quality teacher–child relationship as being characterized by closeness, warmth, positive affect, and a lack of conflict, discordance, and anger. It seems as though Check-In Check-Out could be an intervention that helps to establish this type of relationship and therefore help to promote more positive behavior in the school setting.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Design

This quasi-experimental study examined office referral data before and after the implementation of the Check In Check Out program to determine if any change was evident. The intervention was run for two quarters of the school year, or approximately 20 weeks. Office referrals from the first quarter (before the intervention) were compared to those received in the second and third quarters (during the intervention.) The dependent variable was student behavior, specifically the amount of office referrals received by the student. The independent variable was the implementation of the program.

Participants

Participants were chosen purposively for this study based on the number of negative office referrals received in the first quarter of the 2018-19 school year. A list was created of the students who had received multiple office referrals in that time period. Each of those students was paired with a staff member in the school and met with that staff member twice daily.

Twelve students were included in the study. All students attend the same elementary school and range from Kindergarten to 5th grade. Ten students were male and two were female. Eight were African American and four were Caucasian. Students with IEP's were not included in the study. Twelve staff members also participated as mentors. These staff members included classroom teachers, administrators, paraeducators, and special area teachers.

Instrument

This study utilized a county created office referral sheet. The sheet details time, location, and description of behaviors that caused the writing of the referral. Also utilized was a document that tracks students' who have received office referrals and how many they have received.

Procedure

Participants were selected by the PBIS (Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports) Team at the school. Upon reviewing office referral data, a list of "high flyers" (those receiving multiple office referrals) was created. The staff received information at a faculty meeting about the program and the requirements of being a mentor, and many teachers volunteered to be mentors. The students selected for the program were able to choose a mentor from the list of staff members. The mentors, students and their families were invited to a before school meeting where they met each other, participated in "getting to know you" activities, and created goals for the student as a "team." Then, the students and mentors began meeting in the mornings and afternoons to set behavior goals, discuss whether or not they had been met, and next steps. The intervention continued for the length of Quarter 2 and 3, approximately 20 weeks. The amount of referrals earned by the participating students during the intervention was compared to the amount of referrals earned before participating to determine any noticeable change.

The paired t-test was used to determine if the change in the number of office referrals was statistically significant (at the .05 level). In addition, effect size was calculated to measure the amount of change from pre-to-post independent of the sample size. Effect size assesses the practical significance of the change. This may be especially important for small sample studies.

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of a mentoring program on student behavior. The null hypothesis for the study was that the Check In Check Out program would not decrease office referrals of students participating in the program.

Table 5 shows the raw data collected before implementation, and during implementation of the program. The students, who were chosen to participate based on their number of referrals in Quarter 1 are listed in the first column. The next three columns show the number of referrals they received each Quarter, Quarter 1 being pre-implementation and Quarters 2 and 3 being during implementation.

Table 1.

Raw Data Showing Office Referrals Received

	Qtr 1 Referrals (pre CICO)	Qtr 2 Referrals (during CICO)	Qtr 3 Referrals (during CICO)
Students Participating			
Student 1	7	0	0
Student 2	10	1	
Student 3	9	0	0
Student 4	1	0	0
Student 5	0	0	1
Student 6	22	4	2
Student 7	12	3	1
Student 8	17	3	3
Student 9	5	0	2
Student 10	3	0	0
Student 11	1	0	0
Student 12	6	2	5

Table 1 below shows the overall comparisons between each Quarter individually.

Table 2.

Paired *t*-tests for Q1, Q2, and Q3 Number of Office Referrals for 12 Students

	Mean1	Mean 2	Diff	SD(diff)	t-test	p	Effect Size
Q1 v Q2	7.75	1.08	6.67	5.48	4.21	.002	1.22, Very large
Q2 v Q3	1.08	1.17	0.08	1.44	0.20	.845	0.06, Very small
Q1 v Q3	7.75	1.17	6.58	6.39	3.57	.004	1.03, Large

The following tables show the paired *t*-test results for each Quarter.

Table 3.

Paired *t*-Test for Q1 v Q2, Number of Office *Referrals*

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Err.	Std. Dev.	[95% Conf. Interval]	
referq1	12	7.75	1.942838	6.73019	3.473841	12.02616
referq2	12	1.083333	.4344682	1.505042	.1270752	2.039591
diff	12	6.666667	1.582735	5.482755	3.18309	10.15024

mean(diff) = mean(**referq1** – **referq2**)   t = 4.2121
Ho: mean(diff) = 0   degrees of freedom = 11

Ha: mean(diff) < 0   Ha: mean(diff) != 0   Ha: mean(diff) > 0
Pr(T < t) = 0.9993   Pr(|T| > |t|) = 0.0015   Pr(T > t) = 0.0007

Table 4.

Paired t-Test for Q2 v Q3, Number of Office

Referrals

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Err.	Std. Dev.	[95% Conf. Interval]	
referq2	12	1.083333	.4344682	1.505042	.1270752	2.039591
referq3	12	1.166667	.4578165	1.585923	.1590193	2.174314
diff	12	-.0833333	.4166667	1.443376	-1.00041	.8337438

```
    mean(diff) = mean(referq2 - referq3)                    t =  -0.2000
Ho: mean(diff) = 0                          degrees of freedom =       11

Ha: mean(diff) < 0              Ha: mean(diff) != 0              Ha: mean(diff) > 0
Pr(T < t) = 0.4226           Pr(|T| > |t|) = 0.8451           Pr(T > t) = 0.5774
```

Table 5

Paired *t*-Test for Q1 v Q3, Number of Office Referrals

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Err.	Std. Dev.	[95% Conf. Interval]	
referq1	12	7.75	1.942838	6.73019	3.473841	12.02616
referq3	12	1.166667	.4578165	1.585923	.1590193	2.174314
diff	12	6.583333	1.844149	6.388318	2.52439	10.64228

```
    mean(diff) = mean(referq1 - referq3)                    t =   3.5698
Ho: mean(diff) = 0                          degrees of freedom =       11

Ha: mean(diff) < 0              Ha: mean(diff) != 0              Ha: mean(diff) > 0
Pr(T < t) = 0.9978           Pr(|T| > |t|) = 0.0044           Pr(T > t) = 0.0022
```

The mean gains from Q1 (pre) to Q2 (during) and from Q1 (pre) to Q3 (during) treatment were statistically significant at the customary .05 level. The effect sizes were 1.22 (very large) for Q1 to Q2, and 1.03 (large) for Q1 to Q3. There was no significant change from Q2 to Q3 and the effect size was 0.06 (very small). The significant decline in office referrals occurred from pre to the end of Q1. Thereafter, the number of referrals stabilized. Effect size is the standardized

mean change from one time to the other and is measured by Cohen's d statistic. The effect size is categorized by the following: .01=very small, .20=small, .50=medium, .80=large, 1.20=very large, 2.0+ = huge.

This chapter presents data and information collected during the implementation of the Check In Check Out program. Chapter V will further analyze the results of the data and discuss the implications.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to determine if the use of a one on one mentoring program for students with behavior issues would affect the number of office referrals the child received. The null hypothesis for this study was that there would be no significant change in the number of referrals due to the participation in the Check In Check Out program. The null hypothesis was rejected as it was found that participating in the program did decrease the number of referrals a student received.

Implication of Results

The results of this study support the use of a one on one mentoring program like Check In Check Out as a useful tool in decreasing negative behavior and office referrals. Each of the 12 participating students decreased their number of office referrals during the two quarters of participation. 7 out of the 12 students decreased their office referrals by at least 5 per quarter. One student in particular had a decrease of 18 referrals in the first quarter of the program's implementation. The most drastic of the changes occurred in the first quarter of implementation, with an effect size of 1.22 (a "very large" change) between Quarters 1 and 2. Comparatively, the change between Quarters 1 and 3 was also large at effect size of 1.03. The initial change from Quarter 1 to Quarter 2 remained stable through Quarter 3. This shows that upon the beginning of the mentoring program, there was a fairly immediate change in student behavior. The students who participated seemed eager to meet with their chosen mentor and were disappointed if their usual mentor was absent. (A "substitute mentor" was available to meet with those students whose mentor was out for the day.) Not only did the students Check In at the beginning of the day and Check Out at the end (the requirements of the program), but they also used their

mentor's classroom as a time out location when they needed a break, as well as a place they could visit as a reward. Based on the data, it seems as though the development of this relationship between mentor and mentee did decrease the student's negative behavior.

Threats to Validity

One threat to the validity of the results was the small sample size. Only 12 students participated in the study. While these students experienced positive results, it is difficult to say whether a larger or different population would see the same improvements.

Another threat to the validity of this study are the links to the common trends in behavior issues throughout the school year. Schools often see a lot of referrals in the first quarter of the year, as students are just getting settled in and testing the rules. The teachers have not yet gotten to know the students enough to set up useful behavior management plans or to fully develop relationships of their own. Naturally, office referrals usually decline in the following quarters. It is impossible to say how much of the decrease in referrals was directly linked to the mentoring program versus the other strategies that were being put into place by the teachers and staff.

While all of the students were participating in the program in some capacity, it is hard to determine how many teachers and mentors were using the program with fidelity. Some mentors were not as consistent with meeting with their mentees. Some mentees were not consistent with going to meet their mentors. Some teachers were not allowing students to see their mentees if they were having an off day, viewing the Check Out as a "reward" of sorts. Because there is so much subjectivity to the implementation of the program, it is challenging to say whether or not the program was fully implemented with fidelity, therefore possibly affecting the results.

Connections to Previous Literature

Hawken et al., (2007) described the Check In Check Out program as "efficient and cost effective." Upon utilizing the program, this description seems accurate. CICO was efficient because student meetings with teachers were quick and happened with little disruption to either party's school day. Despite the quick meeting, real relationships were built between the mentee and mentor, which did seem to have a positive effect on the students and their behavior. It was definitely cost effective, as we spent zero dollars on implementation of the program. Overall, with a small bit of planning and managing, the program was easy to utilize.

Collins et al., (2017) noted not only an overall decrease in office referrals, but also positive feedback from students, teachers, and families. The study performed at Edgewood Elementary yielded similar results. Office referrals were decreased, and the teachers and students all seemed to enjoy participating in the program, specifically the relationship development aspect between mentor and mentee.

Implications for Future Research

If this study were to be implemented again, there should be a larger population group studied. Because it only has 12 participants in just one school, the results cannot necessarily be used to predict the outcomes for a larger or different group.

There should also be a way to assure the program is being run consistently and with fidelity, meaning that the students and mentors are meeting twice a day each day, that they are tracking their points and goals, that they are sharing this information with classroom teachers and the student's parents/families, etc. In this study, there was no way to determine or track how consistently these actions were being performed, which could have affected the results. A tracking sheet for the mentors could be a useful way to collect this data.

A control group could be used to compare the referrals received by those participating in the program and those who are not. In this way, it would be more clear whether the decrease in referrals was due to participation or whether it was other things occurring in the classroom and school.

Finally, a survey could be completed by all of the participants (classroom teacher, mentors, mentees, and families of the mentees) to determine their perceptions of the program during and after. Perhaps they would give honest feedback as to whether they enjoyed participating, how difficult implementation of the program actually was, and whether or not they found the program beneficial.

Conclusion

The literature reviewed for this study shows a clear need for mentoring programs in schools that focus on the building of positive relationships between teachers and staff. The results of this study on the impact of the Check In Check Out mentoring program show that this program did indeed decrease negative office referrals in the participating group. While there were some threats to the validity of these results, it does seem as though there was an overall positive experience had by those participating.

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