

Procrustes, “Positive Interventions” and the Limiting Influence of Using PBIS Strategies on the Growth of Students and Schools

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Introduction

This article explores the effects of implementing the classroom behavioral strategies that are commonly associated with the Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) system. I will explore more deeply into some of the “positive” strategies that are recommended and included in PBIS trainings, some of the problems associated with the use of those strategies, and propose what I would consider to be healthier and more growth-promoting alternatives. I will also offer a useful roadmap that implies a pathway for schools to use to progress to the highest levels of their potential (Shindler et al, 2016), and show why schools using PBIS tend to be left stuck in the middle of the road when it comes to long-term growth and progress.

Efforts to establish common school-wide values, as the PBIS system intends, contribute to a more focused, coherent and orderly school (Shindler, 2018). Moreover, focusing on the positive and desired behavior rather than the unwanted behavior is educationally sound. So it is understandable why adopting PBIS would result in an improved level of function at a low performing school (Hierk & Peterson, 2018). However, along with its constructive aspects, the PBIS system has built-in problematic aspects. In our research into schools nationally, we find that those schools that implement the PBIS behavioral interventions faithfully tend to limit their ability to improve the quality of behavior, motivation, and climate over time in ways that schools that use more humanistic strategies do not experience. The primary problem with PBIS seems to be related to the recommended practices. What our findings suggest is that when teachers use the applied behavioral strategies encouraged in PBIS they rate their practices quite highly. They perceive interventions with students to be very positive and respectful, needs satisfying and community building. However, when students were asked to rate those same strategies they had a very different experience being on the other end of them. They rated them as teacher-dominated, manipulative, not very respectful and like they were being compared and even shamed. What I see from my own personal experience is that quite often teachers using PBIS strategies are content to be implementing something “positive” and feel like what they are doing is working. The goal of this article is to provide a deeper examination of PBIS, so that leaders and teachers can fully understand the ways in which using these prescribed practices are affecting their students and their schools in the long-term.

Understanding the Use of the Term “Positive” in Applied Behavioral Psychology

To begin our exploration of PBIS strategies, and what is meant by a “positive” behavioral intervention or support, it is useful to understand what the creators of PBIS mean when they use the term “positive.” To the average ear, in and out of education, when we hear the word “positive” ideas such as optimistic, encouraging, nurturing, and growth promoting come to mind. One of the dictionary definitions for the word positive is - “a good, affirmative, or constructive quality or attribute.” A second definition is – “a quantity with a value higher than zero.” This second definition is much closer than the first when it

comes to how applied behavioral psychologists have defined the term “positive” going back almost a century (Alberto, 2003; Lerman, 2003).

The term “positive” as used in behavioral psychology essentially means to add something as a treatment variable or intervention. Whereas, the term negative means to take something away (Alberto, 2003; Lerman, 2003). So in behaviorism, when we add something that the subject may desire, that would be considered a positive reinforcement. If we add an undesirable response to a behavior that would be a “positive” punishment. Likewise, if we take away something that is undesirable, that is called a negative reinforcement (so in that scenario the negative response is what the subject would desire). And if we take away something that the subject wants, that would be a negative punishment. So as you can see, the public conception of the term positive as being affirmative or nurturing has virtually no relation to how the term is used in behavioral psychology (Landrum & Kaufman, 2006). In behavioral psychology, it is pretty simple, positive is adding something, and negative is taking something away – like we do with numbers in math.

PBIS in Action is:

A system of interventions that are intended to create classroom function and order that include both sound as well as emotionally manipulative strategies, extrinsic motivation, and incongruent emotional messages that result in a teacher-centered classroom and school environment that requires constant maintenance and results in a limiting factor in the growth of the school’s and students’ psychology of success and the ability to move beyond that condition.

Examining a Few of the Recommended Positive Strategies in PBIS

It is useful to next examine a few of the recommended behavioral reinforcement strategies commonly recommended in PBIS. Within the behavioral intervention logic, if I am a teacher who wants to reinforce a behavior, I would first identify the desired behavior and then provide something (i.e., a bribe, a prize, approval, a sticker, a grade, a treat, etc.) that I would judge to be a reinforcement and then give it to students when that behavior is displayed (Albeto & Ttoutman, 2003). In some cases this thinking can lead to a desired result, such as more of the behavior that is wanted, but in many cases it can lead to problems and even hinder the development of the students as individuals and as a collective (Deci et al, 1999). There are hundreds of studies and several excellent treatments explaining the problems with extrinsic rewards, bribes and praise, including Alfie Kohn’s book *Punished by Rewards* (1999), and Dan Pink’s Ted Talks (2009).

The fundamental problems with the use of extrinsic reinforcement strategies include the following three. First, what is it that constitutes a reinforcement? To a pigeon a food pellet may be a reliably desired reinforcement, but to humans, what we seek from our efforts and what gives us satisfaction is more complicated, subjective and situational. Second, giving someone something when they do what we want gets mixed results and is not very effective when it comes to cultivating that person’s intrinsic motivation. (Deci, et al, 1999; Reeve, 2006). In fact, we can systematically extract intrinsic motivation by getting students to be hooked on getting something extrinsic (things, praise, etc.) for doing something that is good to do (their work, being kind, etc), with the long-term result being that they increasingly engage in the task less for a sense of satisfaction, pride, accomplishment, learning, and enjoyment, and more for the reward they get (Pink, 2018; Reeve 2006). The story of the man who wants to rid himself of the noise of children playing in the park is a helpful allegory for this phenomenon

(See text box below). Third, there is almost never just one thing happening in an intervention. We need to take into account all the words, actions, indirect messages, internal processing, and the short and long-term lessons being drawn by the target subject as well as the others who observe it, and a thousand other factors to fully appreciate the effects of an intervention. As we examine a selection of three out of the many strategies that are recommended in PBIS, you will likely see how the simple idea of stimulus (behavior) and response (reward) breaks down pretty quickly when we look at what is actually happening within the entire human phenomenon (Many more PBIS recommended strategies can be found in Figure A and Appendix A).

1. **Personal Praise, or Rewards for Desired Behavior.** In this strategy, when the teacher sees a student who is exhibiting a desired behavior, they provide words that express their approval and affection or a reward of some kind to the student to encourage the repetition of the same behavior. The intention is rather simple and familiar to all of us. We want approval, and when we get it, the assumption is that we are more likely to do the approved behavior again.

To understand the problems with this strategy it is useful to put ourselves in the place of a young person in a room full of other young people with an adult leader. We can imagine doing our work and the adult comes around to us and tells us that they approve of our work and by extension us as a person (i.e., “that is excellent work Sara”). The first time this happens it is likely an enjoyable interaction. But after every interaction like this the focus progressively shifts away from what we were trying to accomplish, what we thought about our work and the assumption that learning is its own reward towards “what does the teacher think of my work?” “Is it OK?” And then increasingly to “if there is no opportunity for praise why am I even doing this?”

Over time when the student begins a task their goal increasing becomes teacher’s approval. Fairly quickly we can turn a group of students who love engaging in a task for its own sake into a group of students who will only do things if there is enough praise or a reward (like the children in the story). In a frequently repeated study, two groups of students are compared – the first who engage in a puzzle where there is no reward and the second who is a promised \$20 reward if they complete the task. In each iteration of this study, the no reward group tends to make a better effort, complete the

How to Extract Intrinsic Motivation: An Allegory

There was once an old man who lived by a park and worked the night shift at the factory. During the day he liked it to be quiet so that he could get some sleep. He lived alone and did not like children very much. So when the children began to play ball at the park and make lots of noise, he became angry. He tried to ignore the noise, but it did not work. As he reflected on his dilemma, he was struck by a cunning plan. The next day, he went to the field and addressed the children. He told them that he loved the sound of their play, and that he once had children and it reminded him of them (neither was true). Then he told them that if they came to play faithfully, he would pay them each a quarter. The children were pleased to say the least, and thought the old man was the greatest. The next day the old man arrived and paid each child a quarter. He did the same thing the next day. The children were very happy. The next day he arrived right on time, but gave the children some bad news. He told them how much he loved to hear their voices as they played and how it made him so happy, but he did not have much money and could only pay them a dime each. The children were a little disappointed, but agreed to come back and play for the smaller amount. As promised, he paid them a dime for the next three days, but on the fourth day he again had some bad news. He told the children that he really hoped that they would come out and play, but that he was out of money and could no longer pay them. At this the children were very upset. After a quick conference, the children decided that they could not play if they were not going to be paid, and they left, never to return. The old man went home and was able to sleep in peace and quiet that afternoon.

puzzle faster, enjoy the task more so want to keep going when the time was up, and rated the task as more fun. The group is promised the reward did not try as hard, completed the puzzle more slowly and stopped as soon as they could. When you look at the students in your local school, which mindset is more common? How many rewards have these students been given to this point in their education?

We do want students to be recognized, given feedback, and affirmed, but we can do it in ways that builds internal motivation and encourages the students own goals, self-assessment and agency (Shindler, 2009).

2. **“I like the way. . .”** In this strategy, when the teacher sees a student (A) who is not doing what the teacher wants, the teacher identifies a student (B) who *is* doing what the teacher wants and says, “I like the way student B is (doing the behavior).” The intended idea is that giving praise to one student for doing a behavior will provide an incentive to other students to do that same behavior, and so potentially receive praise themselves.

To understand the many problems with this strategy, it is useful to again put yourself in the students’ shoes. Imagine a friend, partner, or family member sits down with you and tells you that they really like how another person they know does something well that you do less well. When you hear this, how do you feel? If we asked ten people we would likely get a range of different responses? One person might feel persuaded to consider doing more of the behavior. But many others might feel really manipulated and resentful. At least a few of you might think or say “well now I am even less likely to want to do that behavior.” If we spend a day in a classroom where this strategy is being used we will see all of these responses from students, and many others.

And we should not forget the student who is being praised. How do they feel? Again, there are so many possibilities – happy to be praised, like they have just been used, concerned about how the other students see them, and/or insecure that next time the teacher looks at them they will not give them the approval they have become dependent upon.

3. **Colored Cards or Names on the Board Behavioral System.** I have written extensively about colored card systems. To fully examine how they function and all their drawbacks took several pages (Shindler, 2010). But in a nut shell, these charts are intended to use public shame to modify behavior. The systems usually take the form of a wall chart in which each of the student’s names are placed. Students’ name cards can be placed on the green, yellow or red levels. If the student does not disrupt the class or break any rules their card stays on green – the highest level. If the student does break a rule, the teacher may ask them to go and move their card to yellow – a warning level. And if the student does multiple offenses in a day, their card goes to red.

The intention is that students have a clear visual representation of how well they are doing following the class rules and so they can use the chart as feedback to know if they are on target or not. But the problems with these systems are numerous. First, they are simply put – public shaming. The chart would not be on the wall if not. Some students are motivated by shame to improve (but that still does not mean it is healthy for these students), and others have other reactions like developing a negative self-image, embracing the role of renegade and take pleasure in punishing the teacher by laughing off the system (this is common in my observation). Second, the best classification one can accomplish in the system is to be “OK.” So the focus of information represented on the chart is related to those who are not ok. The chart does not encourage anything positive just staying on task and keeping out of trouble. Aspirational qualities are not represented.

Imagine if outside every home there was a reader board that noted every time someone in that residence got a traffic ticket, missed paying a bill, locked themselves out, got in an argument with their neighbor, etc. How would it affect that neighborhood? and society as a whole? Would we all act more kind and civic-minded and feel more sane as a result of having our misdeeds publically displayed?

There are classroom systems that support students’ self-assessment and the process of moving toward a target of high quality behavior (Shindler 2010). But the humane and ethical systems are fair and private like we have in the adult world in the form of things like an insurance rating or credit score.

Some Effects of Extrinsic Behavior Modification Strategies

- Extracting the intrinsic motivation from students (Deci, 1999)
- Making the student more insecure and needy for adult approval and reduce their internal locus of control (POS factor #1 and the most predictive factor in life success)(Shindler, 2009)
- Reduce the growth of personal growth or self-referential thinking (Kohn, 1999)
- Reduce Self-discipline as they encourage focus on the desires of the external authorities (Reeve, 2006)
- Reduce self-esteem, self-efficacy and personal agency (Deci, 1999)
- Create a competitive and comparison-based climate in a class – undermining the sense of belonging and acceptance and feeling of community in a classroom school (POS factor #2 and the most predictive factor in why students like coming to school).(Shindler, 2009).

You may ask, “Well, what if teachers do these behaviorist strategies with love and sincerity and have the best of intentions?” Certainly the affect and energy that we bring to any interaction is important and will make a difference. But take the example of your friend who tells you that they want you to be more like someone else they know. The manipulation and lack of affirmation is built into the request, so if they said it with a smile and a warm affect, you would still feel the incongruence between what they were asking, what it meant and how they asked it. The result is a message that is not sane and/or “emotionally congruent” as Haim Ginott termed it (1969). Over time in classes where the teacher repetitively uses strategies that are intended to manipulate students into doing what they want, the teacher-student relationship will always lack honesty and the capacity for the quality of unconditional positive regard. Just as it is in our adult personal life – attempts by others to get what they want with indirect techniques breeds frustration and a lack of trust. Very young students are rarely aware of the fact that they are being manipulated or that the verbal messages that their teacher is sending are inconsistent with his/her actions and are thus emotionally incongruent, but if we look at their faces or

could see into their emotions, we would see the insecurity, the inability to trust and the longing for an honest connection to their teacher.

When we look at what is happening in any school, but especially those that have faithfully committed to PBIS as a core program, what we see is the most effective teachers using the recommended behavior modification strategies the least. These more effective teachers, where the students do feel sane and motivated, tend to rely on a different set of practices incorporating healthier and more emotionally congruent messages (See Figure A – High level). They incorporate strategies like clear direct language, the development of clear agreements and boundaries and logical or natural consequences rather than the manipulative and indirect strategies or reward systems or color cards that they were encouraged to use in a PBIS workshop. These teachers’ instincts seem to guide them to being fundamentally honest and straight with students and so they cannot bring themselves to be manipulative or shaming even in the interest of short-term order. This is partly because these teachers don’t tend to struggle as much with order because they find that using a clear plan for teaching and practicing routines and attention alleviates the need for the teacher to be constantly manipulating each students’ behavior. Once their systems are internalized by students, there is little maintenance required like there is in an extrinsic response-based teacher-centered classroom.

Figure A: Three Levels of Classroom Management Practice, Examples of Each, and the Predicted Effect for Each Level

Level of Practice	Overall Effect	Some Examples
HIGH Student-centered, Sound and healthy Classroom Management, Discipline and Motivational practices	Encourage clarity of the expectations, student collective function, self-responsibility and self-motivation and ever increasing sense of trust and team over time. Provides for the capacity of a student-centered classroom where classroom values and agreements are internalized and refined within a democratic structure.	Using well established norms, guiding questions, logical consequences to change behavior, having students self-assess their choices, effort and work quality, creating class agreements, class meetings, debriefing the process, students set goals, team building, highlighting class collective wins, mindfulness, using clear language for correction, being warm and unconditionally affirming, encouraging students own progress, providing more choices and freedom as students show they are able to take it on.
MIDDLE Teacher-centered, Control-based, Positive Behavioral Interventions	Helps define what is expected and can promote compliance, consistency and teacher-centered order over time, but students do not gain a sense of self-responsibility and/or group cohesion. Students can often become dependent on adult reinforcement to know how to act or define success. Typically results in some obedience and some resentment depending on the receptivity of the students.	Token economies and other reward systems, colored card charts, personal praise, public praise of individuals, moving into proximity of students who are off task, individual reward plans, preferred activity reward, pizza party for group goal attainment, prizes, stickers or stars, pointing out the behavior of a student who is on task to send a message to another who is not, pointing out a student who is off task to send a message to others, and make the student feel publically shamed, wall charts comparing student to student progress rates. Using overt affection and/or the withdrawal of affection to individuals or the group to modify behavior.
LOW Unsound but commonly used practices for trying to get others to change their behavior	Help students know what makes the teacher happy or unhappy, and learn ways to cope with, react to, and work with the situation they are in. Tends to lead to low levels of student performance, motivation and group cohesion over time.	Yelling, put downs, personally challenges to the student, passive aggressive ways of getting back at students, moping and emotional withdrawal, lectures, bringing up past failures to motivate, shaming, blaming others, asking for excuses, making excuses, threatening calls home, emotional outbursts, pain-based punishments, comparing students or classes, sarcasm used to affect others, putting students in their place with power plays, keeping students insecure to maintain control, being passive and not doing what you said, neglecting the needs of the students out of apathy or hostility.

Three-to-One

In the PBIS literature one of the key tenants is to use three positives for every negative. (Hierck & Peterson, 2018). On the surface this sounds sensible. But to better understand what this recommendation implies in practice, we need to first revisit the applied behavioral definition of “a positive” – that is, an intervention that is adding something. Therefore, what it refers to is using three extrinsic reinforcements for desired behaviors for every negative recognition or desist for an unwanted behavior (which is technically a “positive punishment” in behaviorist terms). Following the three-to-one advice the teachers’ intervention may not be encouraging or affirming or lead to anything positive, it just has to focus on reinforcing/obtaining a desire behavior rather than on stopping/punishing an undesired one.

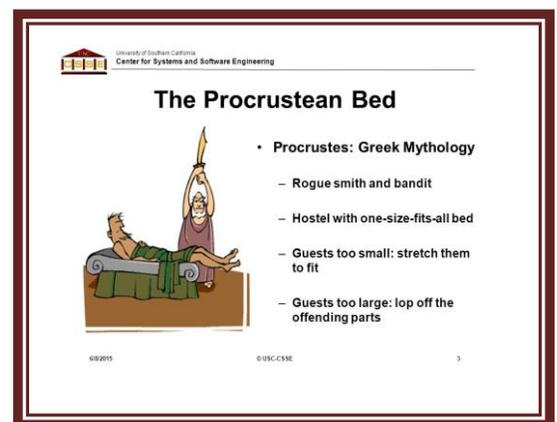
Using Figure A, if we locate these “positive” choices, we can see that they are all located in the middle level of the chart. We might assume that everything in the bottom level would be categorized as negatives as well, thus things to do less often. Almost entirely absent from “three to one advice” is an encouragement to use any of the fundamentally more healthy options represented in the High level in Figure A. An apt food analogy would be to tell a parent to make sure that their child ate three pieces of pizza (or other unsweetened starchy foods) for every sugary dessert. Eating Pizza is probably healthier than eating only dessert, but what about all the other more healthy food options not recommended? Moreover, the goal of focusing 75% of our words on wanted behavior is better than letting whatever we are thinking come out of our mouths, but when it is done with manipulative and emotionally disingenuous strategies, it is unlikely to be a truly “positive” intervention.

A few years ago, after meeting at a conference, I exchanged emails with one of the founders of PBIS. I suggested at the time that they might want to consider (in so many words) more of what are listed above in Figure A as the top level of practice into PBIS. His response was (in essence), “No thanks” and “The two of us just viewed classroom management differently.” At the time this surprised me a little. But as I have come to better understand the fundamental underpinnings of applied behavioral psychology, I see that they perceive behavior to be essentially a product of conditioning - better conditioning equals better behavior. Therefore exploring the various dimensions of the human person is not behavioral so not measurable, and therefore outside the bounds of a purely empirical approach. Hence the goal of creating the high functioning student-centered class where students develop self-responsibility, self-efficacy, a sense of community and belonging, and a growth orientation is not consistent with the values and goals of an applied behavioral approach like PBIS.

Limiting Influence of PBIS on School Growth and Performance

In Greek mythology, the character Procrustes was a rogue smith who created a bed where he would lay his unsuspecting victims. The bed was at an established length. For those victims who were too tall Procrustes would cut some of them off, and for those who were too short, he would stretch them to make them fit the bed. As we examined the SCAI climate and student achievement data from our data set from a few hundred schools, and from other data sets as well, we find that implementing PBIS has much the same effect on a

school as Procrustes had on those whom he lured. In general, implementing PBIS tends to do a reliable



job at stretching a school with an existing low level of function to an average level of function. It does an adequate job of keeping a school at a middle level of function where it is. But it will impede and even regress the growth level of any school past that middle level of function (See Figure B).

PBIS and RTI (Response to Intervention) are commonly promoted as research-based or evidence-based programs. The research supporting these programs tends to come from schools that were performing poorly before implementing the programs. So, while it is possible that schools that are currently experiencing a poor level of function and are characterized by the use of a large amount of dysfunctional classroom management and school discipline practice (i.e., low level practices outlined in Figure A) will see improved overall performance with PBIS. For these schools, PBIS will likely improve the levels of practice consistency, help shift of the focus of both teachers and students to the desired rather than the undesired behavior, engage students with low motivational levels in the short-term, provide students with cognitive limitations or chronic impulse control and attentional issues a structured plan to focus on improvement, and other desired effects. So, for the school where the introduction of a consistent behavioral approach would be an upgrade, PBIS will often improve behavior and by extension achievement. And for the typical public school today, the principles and recommended practices of PBIS will in most cases be pretty consistent with things like Assertive Discipline training that many of their teachers have been exposed to. Moreover, it may provide a renewed focus on the development of a more consistent school-wide definition and strategy set. And assisting those teachers who relied on the lower level strategies to raise their game to the middle level will raise the average practice level at the school (See Figure A). So PBIS can legitimately claim that it can potentially lead to improved outcome measures when applied to a poorly functioning school, or in schools where there are many teachers who have an intractable habit of using low level practices. Yet, while PBIS can claim to encourage improved outcomes in some schools, it does not mean that its methods should be considered psychologically healthy or desirable (especially in the long run).

Moreover, while PBIS and its focus on “positive” strategies support improved outcomes for a school that is low performing, those same prescription results in a limiting effect for schools that seek to progress to higher levels of performance. When those in a schools are seeking to create such qualities as student self-responsibility, student-centered learning, independence and maturity, classroom community and belonging, a growth orientation, supporting students who need to have their confidence boosted, intrinsic motivation and a sense of personal efficacy then they find that those same strategies that helped the school who was struggling, now impede and are counterproductive to their ability to create the more aspirational, expansive, healthy, and long-term desirable qualities.

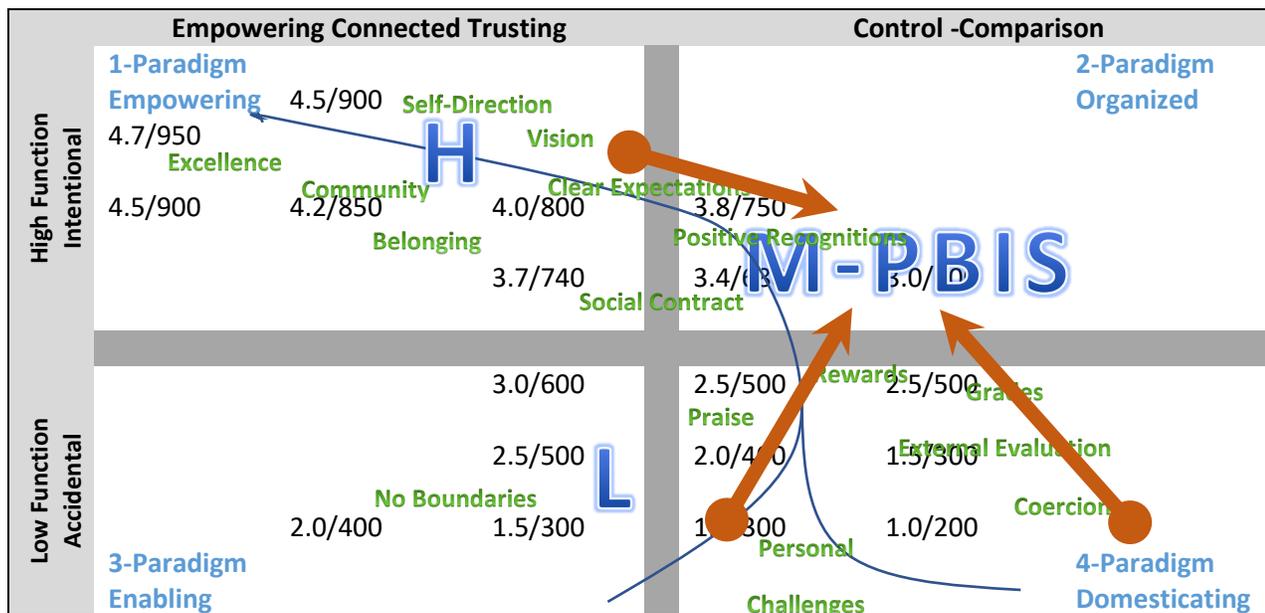
Why is PBIS so Limiting? The Big Picture

In our research into hundreds of schools we have found that school function, performance and climate can be explained and even mapped to a great extent. When we assess a school's climate and function, we find an almost perfect correlation (typically about 0.7) between their ASSC School Climate Assessment Instrument (SCAI) scores and measures of student achievement (Shindler, et al, 2016), as well as other areas such as discipline referrals, attendance, and the absence of violence and bullying. Fundamental to our school effectiveness framework is a basic construct for a “psychology of success” (POS). What we find is that when the goals of a school includes creating 1) more internal vs external locus of control, 2) a personal and collective sense of acceptance and belonging, and 3) a growth vs fixed-ability orientation (Dweck, 2010), that school does better on all accounts. So embedded into the

SCAI instruments is assessing the extent to which a school engages in practice that promote (or undermine) these POS qualities.

Taking the data from the schools that we have assessed, and emergent constructs that have proven valid and reliable, including POS, we have created a school effectiveness “roadmap” that is able to locate the performance of any school as it relates to its climate, function and performance. The roadmap has both a vertical and a horizontal axis representing theoretical continua. The vertical axis represents the degree to which there is function, intention and organizational capacity versus dysfunction, accidentalness and reactivity. The horizontal axis represents the extent to which the institution is attempting to be more empowering, trusting, connected, and student-centered, versus controlling, fear-based, external and teacher centered. Figure B below, depicts the full theoretical roadmap with predicted climate scores (1=low to 5=high) and achievement scores (200=low to 1000 = high) located on a pathway from the lowest performing locations in quadrant/Paradigm-4 to the highest in quadrant/Paradigm-1 (Shindler, 2018).

Figure B: Complete Four Quadrant School Improvement Theoretical Roadmap with SCAI and API Ratings Locations, Descriptive Terms, and the Common Location In Which Schools Using PBIS tend to Be Found Over Time



In high performing schools (location marked with an H, in the Paradigm 1 quadrant) students are encouraged to attain ever higher levels of self-confidence, self-responsibility and self-discipline in a context in which they learn to work in collaboration with others in challenging contexts that promote a growth orientation toward themselves and their work. Both the students and the adults in these schools report that this is their intention and that it is operationalized into practice. Moreover, in these schools there is an understanding of the need to incorporate primarily practices that are defines by the highest level in Figure A above, and the use of middle level practices (i.e., extrinsic, manipulative, controlling, emotionally manipulative or obedience driven practices and messages) only when it is absolutely necessary, and eliminate the use of the lowest level practices altogether. SCAI ratings at these schools tend to be between 3.8 and 4.8 and achievement scores tend to be above the 70th percentile.

Most middle function schools, those who rate around 3 to 3.5 on the SCAI climate survey and in the 40th-60th percentile in achievement tend to employ a more extrinsic, teacher-centered and program-based approach (see location M on the roadmap, located in Paradigm 2 quadrant). PBIS schools typically fall into this middle range location. Schools at this level typically have consistent discipline policies and are relatively orderly and with little of the chaotic, excessively reactive, and overly punitive or passive practices seen in lower level schools. In these schools, students typically know what to expect, become familiar with the consistently applied practices, and are usually aware of what acceptable behavior entails.

Low level schools are characterized by a low level of coherence and intention and employ a high level of low level practices as outlined in Figure A. Their SCAI climate ratings are also lower – usually below 3.0 out of 5. So as mentioned, PBIS practices represent a step up for low performing schools.

However, in our analogy of the mythical Greek character of Procrustes, that middle level 2-Paradigm destination becomes the upper limit of the growth trajectory for schools that adopt PBIS – about 3.0-3.5 out of 5 SCAI climate rating and about 50-65%tile student achievement. Moreover, what our data tell us is that *there is no amount of successful 2-Paradigm practice that will help a school achieve 1-Paradigm results or location on the roadmap.*

What our School Survey item Level Data Tell Us About How “Positive Behavioral Practices Are Perceived

To understand why PBIS schools tend to get landlocked into the middle range of the school effectiveness roadmap, it is useful to look more deeply into SCAI data from various schools. The amount of PBIS being used in any school is often not fully known to us, so we can only speak to those schools where we know the kinds of classroom management and motivational strategies that are consistently used. But in many cases the effects of the schools’ policies and programmatic initiatives can be seen rather clearly in the data we collect. Because the use of any practice will resonate out into every area of a school (our findings support the notion that every action is connected and consequential), the effects of PBIS practices can be seen in many tangential outcomes. So the impact of classroom management choices can be seen in several aspects of a school’s data. And in most cases, we find that the kinds of classroom management policy and program choices reflect a broader set of values at a school, so they are both cause and effect (Shindler, 2018).

Here we narrow the lens and turn our focus to data from PBIS and non-PBIS schools on certain items on the SCAI related to classroom management and discipline. Specifically, we will explore differences between student and teacher ratings on the SCAI between two typical urban schools with diverse student populations – School A and School B. Both schools have a well-defined school agenda related to classroom management and school discipline. Both schools took the same school climate survey – the SCAI in the spring of 2018. Both are secondary schools and exist within the same general public school policies in the same state. So by most measures they are highly similar in size, grade level and student composition. Ratings from Dimension 5 of the SCAI are used below to compare the schools in the area of classroom management and discipline experience.

School A: Non-PBIS School – At this school there is no single approach to classroom management. But a high value is placed on creating good teacher-student relations. Examining the SCAI data from School A, the ratings are in the average or a little better than average range (@3.7 overall). We see schools with much higher ratings and schools where students rate the teacher practices higher than the teachers themselves, but school A is quite normal in that teacher ratings are in the same range as the students. In part, this is because on the SCAI participants are asked to rate their school on an analytic

trait scale (rather than on a less specific Likert Scale) in which they are given three levels of description. As one can see from the chart below on dimension 5 as a whole both teachers and students rated the classroom management practices at the school generally as a 3.8 out of 5.

Table A1: School A: Dimension Five Ratings on SCAI survey

D5	Management Discipline	Teachers	Students
5a	consistency of discipline-policy	3.36	3.87
5b	clear expectations of discipline policy	3.45	4.00
5c	effective discipline	4.00	3.97
5d	student-generated ideas for rules	3.57	3.50
5e	basic needs fulfillment	4.21	3.77
5f	teacher-student supportive interactions	4.11	3.91
5g	promotion of student self-direction	3.86	3.71
5h	promotion of community in class	3.66	3.58
[]	Dimension - 5 Scores	3.8	3.8

When we examine item 5f from the SCAI survey for School A related to how supportive and respectful the members of the school would rate the common teacher practices, we find that again teachers and students are in general agreement. Both groups rated this area middle to high, and for both groups the most frequent rating was a top rating of 5 out of 5 (reflecting agreement with the top level statement).

Table A2: School A: Teacher and Student Ratings on Item 5f of the SCAI

5f	teacher-student supportive interactions	Teachers	Students
LVL1	<i>Teacher-student interactions are mostly teacher-dominated and reactive.</i>	0	8
LVL2	<i>Teacher-student interactions could be typically described as fair but teacher-dominated.</i>	2	12
LVL3		12	66
LVL4	<i>Teacher-student interactions could be typically described as supportive and respectful.</i>	20	49
LVL5		22	93
	Mean	4.11	3.91

School B: PBIS Committed - School B has committed to implementing PBIS over the past two years. As you can see from the SCAI D5 ratings there is a wide discrepancy between how students see the classroom management and discipline at the school and how the teachers see it (+0.65, 3.68 – 3.03). The student ratings include assessing the policy to be more consistent and clear than the teachers. But, when it came to rating how the discipline affected them, the students and the teachers ratings varied widely. There was a nearly 1.0 rating difference (about one standard deviation) when it came to things like students feeling like their basic needs were met, feeling like the teacher’s strategies promoted community, and whether they felt like the teacher’s strategies and interactions with them were supportive and respectful.

Table B1: School B: Dimension Five Ratings on SCAI survey

D5	Management Discipline	Teacher Ratings	Student Ratings
5a	consistency of discipline-policy	3.58	3.61
5b	clear expectations of discipline policy	3.20	3.43
5c	effective discipline	3.84	3.05
5d	student-generated ideas for rules	3.18	2.65
5e	basic needs fulfillment	3.84	2.84
5f	teacher-student supportive interactions	4.02	3.07
5g	promotion of student self-direction	3.59	2.77
5h	promotion of community in class	3.82	2.84
[]	Dimension - 5 Scores	3.68	3.03

n

When we examine item 5f from the SCAI survey for School B related to how supportive and respectful the members of the school would rate the common teacher practices, unlike School A, we can see a strong gap in perception. Like School A, the most frequent teacher self-rating was a 5 out of 5, which would indicate a high level of confidence in themselves and their peers in execution in this area (Note that they did not rate themselves high in other areas, of this scale or the others). In contrast, the students at the school perceived the strategies used by the teachers as much less respectful. More students rated the teachers’ practices at the lowest level versus highest. And like SCAI ratings in general from PBIS schools, students mostly rated things as middle (i.e., teacher-centered, functional, but not empowering or supportive). As is the case generally, when the teachers were executing their PBIS strategies to reinforce students who were on task, what the students heard was a lot of shame, comparison and manipulative language. They did not hear respect.

Table B2: School B: Teacher and Student Ratings on Item 5f of the SCAI

5f	teacher-student supportive interactions	Teachers	Students
LVL1	<i>Teacher-student interactions are mostly teacher-dominated and reactive.</i>	1	68
LVL2		1	57
LVL3	<i>Teacher-student interactions could be typically described as fair but teacher-dominated.</i>	12	209
LVL4		13	103
LVL5	<i>Teacher-student interactions could be typically described as supportive and respectful.</i>	18	63
	Mean	4.02	3.07

These findings are pretty common for schools using PBIS. We have seen this gap in rating as wide as 1.4 at other PBIS schools. And SCAI data from schools who are committed to 1-Paradigm promoting practices tends to reflect a gap in the other direction. The students report the teachers as being

supportive, respectful and encouraging their growth, and the teachers rate themselves a little lower. I interpret that as indicating that the teachers assume they could be doing better.

These few items illustrate a quite profound difference in perceptions between those intending a 1-Paradigm versus a 2-Paradigm school. In the 2-Paradigm school binary thinking tends to be prevalent. Are students on or off task? Are we implementing the program correctly or not? Are students meeting the standards or not? In the 1-Paradigm school, things tend to be viewed in continua of quality and growth. How do we create more intrinsic motivation? Where are the students in the process of becoming effective collaborative teams? What are the most authentic ways we can see evidence of learning?

The information provided by these SCAI items is just another window into understanding why 2-Paradigm practices such as PBIS tend to result a dramatically different school climate and performance level than a commitment to 1-Paradigm intentions and practices.

Some of the Problems Created by PBIS

While PBIS can be an albeit limited solution to some problems at a school – especially in those schools that are low performing in the area of behavior and management, the list of ways that it can create its own set of new problems is very long. Most noticeably, this appears as both teachers and students getting stuck in the behaviorist hamster wheel - teachers getting comfortable with a behavioral reinforcement and/or intervention mentality (the feeling of power and control can be addictive) and losing site of the larger picture and the long-term effects of what they are doing - and students becoming addicted to being praised and rewarded for being on task, and fearing the loss of affirmation if they get off task. But there are other less foreseeable issues that are likely to arise. Here is a few:

- School performance indicators get stuck at or below the 60%tile (as discussed above)
- Other initiatives that require more student self-responsibility and self-motivation are hindered. For example, efforts to encourage social-emotional learning growth will run up against the extrinsic mentality in the class. The inherent competition and comparison of the PBIS strategies will inherently hinder efforts to promote community and a sense of belonging and acceptance.
- Once students are acclimatized to an extrinsic system, it takes a great deal to wean them off it and replenish their intrinsic motivational capacity. In behavioral terms we can expect what is called an “extinction burst” (Alberto & Troutman, 2003). “For example, if a teacher in one grade incorporates a heavy use of PBIS – especially something like a token economy, the teacher (or school) that inherits the group of students, starts the next year in a hole. To move a group of students who are used to mostly middle level control-based practices (See Figure A), to high level – empowerment practices will take at least a year or more if undertaken by a highly skilled faculty and staff.
- High performing teachers who have become expert at high level practices will struggle with what to do when they are asked to devolve their practice and do things they feel are inconsistent with their believes, values, ethics and what they have found to be effective. Likewise, student teachers who are placed in a PBIS school experience a substantive amount of internal conflict when they are being asked by their mentor teacher to use middle level practices and they university supervisor is asking them to use high level practices.
- The emergence of a growing number of students who begin to act out and rebel against what they consciously or unconsciously perceive to be manipulative, controlling and disingenuous practices and emotional messages.
- The need for constant maintenance and adult interventions to sustain order.

Moving Up the Roadmap and Shifting Away from Limiting Practices

There are many good sources of thinking related to discipline and classroom management these days that do provide healthy and effective means for creating that high function, POS promoting, socially emotionally healthy classroom. The books *Transformative Classroom Management*, *Conscious Discipline*, *Discipline without Tears*, and the writings of William Glasser, Alfie Kohn and many many others seek to make that emotionally healthy and growth promoting 1-Paradigm classroom a reality. And just to clarify, what our research shows is that when we create that high function 1-Paradigm student-centered world and become expert in employing the high level practices from Figure A, the typical result is a higher level of order and achievement and less adult stress and strain over time. So the idea that one must give up classroom order in the pursuit of human development is a myth.

If your school is already using PBIS, you might consider a few strategies to alter course. First, it will be useful to help all of the teachers understand that the “positive strategies” that are recommended in PBIS as desirable should be more accurately described as necessary when things are beyond help – at best. There are a lot of better strategies that accomplish better results and do not have the built-in unhealthy aspects and limiting influence. Think - exchanging dependence on the middle level practices in Figure A for growth as an expert in practices depicted at the high level.

Second, the teachers and staff need to appreciate that there will be a period of adjustment before things get better. You have spent x amount of time creating dependency on extrinsic feedback and addicting students to seeing the purpose of their work as the reward not the learning or enjoyment. So you will have to live with the withdrawal. But let the students know that a better (motivationally constructed) world is around the corner, and it will be to their benefit when we get there. In one 1-Paradigm school a motto is “the reward at this school is that we don’t give rewards.”

Third, it will be useful to do as many high performing schools do – replace recipes and programs with high quality principles (like “psychology of success”) and systems for having teachers share high quality ideas with one another (i.e., becoming a true professional learning community).

In Conclusion

While PBIS strategies have shown the ability to support the improvement of the level of function and performance at school that were previously in low function states, PBIS has a built-in set of limits due to its extrinsic foundation and its tendency to reinforce a control-based teacher-centered environment. When we place the intentions and recommended practices of PBIS on the school effectiveness roadmap, we can see that it fits in the 2-paradigm location. Our data from the many schools that we have surveyed who have committed to PBIS shows that those schools tend to have better school climates and performance levels when compared to other low performing schools, but also lower levels of climate and performance when compared to schools that are intending 1-Paradigm practices and policies. We therefore recommend that schools who are seeking to create a high performing student-centered school characterized by a high level of self-responsibility, love of learning, belonging and acceptance and growth orientation limit their use of PBIS practices and seek to adopt practices that are healthier and more consistent with a 1-Paradigm vision and set of values.

Appendix A: Some of the Most Commonly Recommended Strategies in PBIS, Why they Are Problematic, And More Healthy and Effective Alternatives for Each.

Strategy	Why it is Problematic	Healthy and Effective Alternative
Giving extrinsic rewards to bribe students into doing things	When we give students something extrinsic for doing something that we would want them to intrinsically value, we are killing their intrinsic motivation and training them to think that the primary reason they would want to do the task is because they are getting something non-educational for it in the end. If we set up this bargain in the form of a bribe, we are helping ensure that our students will do nothing without being given a bribe first. Study after study shows that giving rewards may get an initial response but eventually undermines motivational levels and decreases the likelihood that students display the desired behavior or performance level over time.	If we look into the top classrooms, we see engaging instruction and students who have a sense of internal locus of control and a growth orientation. Engaging learning is inherently motivational. Working with others and solving problems activates our intrinsic motivation. Sharing what we do gives us a sense of pride and self-efficacy. A sense of accomplishment that comes from reaching a goal and persisting through a challenge encourages an even greater level of motivation for the next task. Yet, when we introduce an extrinsic reward into the equation all those internal motivational instincts are suppressed to some degree.
Praising desired behavior with personal compliments	When we give personal praise we are giving the student something extrinsic (our approval and affection) for something they most likely see as part of who they are. This creates a shift away from their own sense of agency and intrinsic motivation, and over time makes them more dependent on external praise and promotes insecurity and a fear of failure.	Use positive recognitions, reflective questions or refrain from saying anything. Rule 1 is do nothing to rob them of their intrinsic motivation and sense of internal locus of control. So often just asking a question about how it is going, or finding something interesting about what they are doing shows that we are interested, without a thinly veiled agenda of giving our approval for what we want disguised as something positive.
Negative Recognitions “Brian, I told you to put that away.”	When we remind a student to stop doing something that he/she already knows not to do (“Brian!” or “We are waiting for Brian”), we essentially train him/her to 1) keep doing it, and 2) wait for us to remind them to stop, and 3) assume that all he/she needs to do is to tolerate occasional reminders, yet is never required to actually change their behavior. These interventions also add a negative energy into the climate of the room and send the implicit message that the teacher is struggling to promote order in the class.	First, become an expert in technical management, and stop trying to be clever and tricky. Learn to use a clear cue for 100% attention, expect 100% attention, and stop whenever you don’t have it, until it is the norm. When a student or a few of them do not understand that expectation, you will likely need to work with them to help them see that they need to find a way to self-regulate asap. And when it is the whole class, such things as clarifying statements (i.e., “We are all giving Maria our 100% attention, and she will wait until she has it.”) are useful for bringing positive clarity for what needs to be happening. (See Ch. 4 and 5 of TCM).
“Proximity Control” Standing nearer the Students who are off Task	Much like negative recognitions, using our physical proximity to try to modify student behavior essentially trains students to assume they only need to be on task when we are standing near them and intimidating them with our presence. We make the implicit deal that we need to be close to them or we cannot assume or trust anything good will happen. It is a lose-lose for us and the students. Over time students remain irresponsible and we are never able to	Being among our students is a great idea. Interact, and be involved, but not as a walking patroller, but a teacher. If students are off task, use expectation clarifiers, or purposeful individual interventions. We should be making constant comments related to what quality process investment should look like at any point (i.e., Ask yourself, are you executing your role in a way that is working to the benefit of your group?) If a group is off task, we need to help them self-evaluate and find solutions for being on task

	feel confident and trusting.	
Using Colored Card Chart Behavior Systems	Simply put, this is using public shame to try to coerce students into compliance. It does not deal with the real problems – either related to the student or what is happening in the classroom. So will not lead to real solutions. It focuses primarily on the negative, but in a global and non-specific way, so is not instructive in any way. And in the end it actually tends to encourage students to stay stuck and comfortable at their color level, especially those at the bottom levels.	It is wise to avoiding any public student-student comparisons in all areas but especially with behavior. It only makes everything else in the class worse. However, using an intentional well-constructed system for assessing quality student effort, investment, cooperation, and/or participation can be really effective. Done correctly, it can help clarify what “good” looks like for students in a concrete and specific manner. And it can be used by the teacher to help clarify tasks, process quality, and what high quality behavior looks like for those who need it. (See complete web-article at www.transformativeclassroom.com)
Saying “I like the way ___ is ___ing” to modify those who are not ___ing.	Manipulative strategies almost always back-fire. When we try to modify one students’ behavior by publicly praising another student, we are being insincere and deceptive. It leads to confused emotions in the students, and undermines the sense of acceptance and belonging in the class. When students hear us referring to one group and seeming to direct our attention to another they might ask themselves “Who were we talking to?” “Have they just been compared?” And if so, “Do they care?” Avoiding using the words “I like” unless you are talking about your sincere personal preferences.	The clean clear positive non-personal alternative is a positive recognition. Instead of making it personal, simply help the class see what the quality behavior that you want looks like. A phrase such as “I see groups who have all their equipment out and are determining ...” help everyone better see what good looks. Or we can use clarifying statements or questions (i.e., “I might be asking myself or those in my group Right now.”) to help make a quality task more clear (See Ch 4 in TCM)
Saying “thank you” as a way to reinforce wanted behavior	Why would we want to diminish the power of our sincere gratitude and the words “Thank You” by turning them into a knee jerk strategy given for compliance? If we are trying to create an authentic relationship with our students, we want to use our words to reinforce unconditional positive regard (love) and a sane and congruent message. Using caring messages to manipulate undermines that quality.	Say “Thank You” “I like that” or give praise when you are speaking as one authentic human being to another. In the role of the teacher, you need to make it about them, and their growth and how we can all produce quality outcomes, and not about you. So a phrase like “We are getting there, cool” or just saying what is happening positive or negative is respectful. Let them know how they are doing relative to their goals and what is good for the collective. They need useful information, not your blessing.

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