



PROACTIVE STRATEGIES FOR EFFICIENT DISCIPLINE POLICY

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Abstract: *The teachers and other professionals have the responsibility to attain two extremely important objectives for their students: the task of teaching (the transfer of knowledge, skills and attitudes) and the task of nurturing the development of student personality. In the school and remedial/therapeutic settings, teachers and professionals specialized in working with children and adolescents have to face different types of disruptive behaviour (externalized – acting out - or internalized – withdrawing), of broad range of intensity and severity. In actual context of integrated education, of focusing on educational offer for students with disabilities (including children with emotional and behavioural disorders), the challenge is to efficiently approach the educational and disciplinary problems. Disciplinary problems challenge schools and teachers to broad their set of strategies of behavioural management and conflict resolution and to design programs for student emotional and social skills development.*

These objectives require an ordered, safe and prone to learning environment, so educational and remedial/therapeutic settings have developed their own discipline policy. In many cases, these handbooks of school discipline policy detail consequence sequences designed to “teach” these students that they have violated a school rule, and that their “choice” of behaviours will not be tolerated. In most cases, implementing reactive and punished-based measures proved to be effective only in the recrudescence in frequency and severity of antisocial behaviours but failed in solving the causes of these behaviours. The measure of efficiency of educational and remedial/therapeutic interventions should be based and sustained by scientific theory and empirical data. Empirical data suggest that pro-active (positive and preventive) measures are far more efficient in solving discipline problems, and, more important, in teaching life-lasting prosocial abilities and conflict management and solving problems skills. Positive psychology and positive education offer a valuable frame and principles that enable the educational organizations and specialized staff members with the necessary tools to attain these valuable goals. In this paper, we stress the importance of developing a positive behavioural support (PBIS) at institutional level and the importance of continuing professionalization of professionals working with children and adolescents by developing interventional skills, at all

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level: primary, secondary and tertiary intervention. The LSCI Method will be presented as an illustrative model.

Reducing the aggressiveness and developing a positive behavior represent in the authors' opinion, the most important way to prevent delinquent behavior.

Keywords: *discipline policy, positive behavioural support, the LSCI Method, crime prevention*

Discipline – aim and methods

Before any assessment of an educational activity, strategy or curricula, one should answer first to the puzzling question: What is the aims of (re)education? And the answers are changing continuously in order to illustrate the actual perspective and apprehension on human nature and destiny, as a well-actualized person and as a valuable member of society. O'Connor (1968, apud. Ong, C.L., 2013) offers a broader aim of education as an "elaborate social mechanism designed to bring about in the persons submitted to it certain skills and attitudes that are judged to be useful and desirable in that society". In summary, the aims of education should be idiosyncratic and contextualized to the society of interest (Ong, C.L.:4).

In the process of education, we need to assure the optimum conditions for that learning to take place in programmed and orderly way, so we developed, also, a set of rules of appropriate conducts in educational settings and situations.

The ultimate scope and objectives of almost all discipline school/residential setting policy is (or it should be) to establish safe and positive learning communities which increase students responsibilities and students learning, in order to develop students self-discipline (ex., respect themselves and others, own and solve their problems, see problems as opportunities, make decisions and live with the consequences, acknowledge their feelings and those of others, continue to grow in theirs understanding of school virtues, etc.).

These objectives are very important and valuable in the pursuit of the final educational goal of an educational system: a coherent student plan of development, as a whole, as an independent, responsible and active person, with harmonious personality and helpful knowledge and skills for him and for society. The situation is similar for residential and therapeutic settings.

As important as they are, these objectives could be attained in satisfactory degrees only if the strategy involved, and its subsequent philosophy, are suitable for this project and are sustained by scientific theories and proofs of efficiency.

In the pursuit of school/classroom discipline, we have always remembered that our final goal is the child, the „educational ideal” institute and sustained by the society and its system of values.

There are different approaches of educating a child/student and most of them have generated structured systems of educating and disciplining.

Positive psychology – positive education

Teachers have to accomplish responsibly two very important tasks for their students: the training task (transferring knowledge, skills and attitudes) and the personality developing task. Traditionally, the intervention strategies for aggressive behaviours in the educational and remedial settings tend to be mostly reactive, not proactive (Sugai&Horner, 2002; Dârjan, 2010).

An important body of scientific work provides evidence that strong and supportive relationships between teachers and students are fundamental to the healthy development of all students in schools (Ladd, G. W., & Burgess, K. B., 2001). Positive student–teacher relationships serve as a resource for students at risk of school failure, whereas conflict or disconnection between students and adults may compound that risk (Ladd, G. W., & Burgess, K. B., 2001).

The relationships between the specialist and the students will define the affective climate of the setting, and will have an important impact in student's academic and, sometimes, personal/private life. The construction of this relationship represents a common effort and works as a double way communications (the children's concepts are manifested in their emotional and behavioural reactions, which evoke specific adult reactions and vice versa, motivation born motivation, and, sadly, aggression rises aggression). Although this is a bidirectional construction, the teacher/staff member, as a socialization agent, should direct the path and control the interchanges in order to obtain desired outcomes.

Seligman (2005), taking into account the reality of present situation of children's and youths' mental health (the increase in incidence of depression and anxiety disorders with the age of the first onset decreasing from adulthood to adolescence), advocates for the importance of taking care in school for children's well-being, as well as for their achievement (success, literacy, discipline). Seligman considers that school is the best place to teach well-being, and by doing so it will attain three important goals: offering an antidote for depression, creating a vehicle for increasing life satisfaction and facilitating better learning and more creative thinking (Seligman et.al., 2005). *More well-being is synergistic with better learning*. The system proposed by Seligman, deriving from Positive Psychology, is called Positive Education and aim for teaching in school both the skills of well-being and the skills of achievement.

Positive psychology considers that psychology should be as concerned with strength as with weakness, be as interested in building the best things in life as in repairing the worst, be as concerned with making the lives of normal people fulfilling as with healing pathology, and to develop Interventions to increase well-being, not just to decrease misery.

Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000, apud. Ong, 2013) articulated that psychology has to move beyond a diseased model of remediating what is wrong, fixing what is broken, and repairing the worst.

Positive schools, which in addition to focusing on psychological distress of students, proposes, also, a proactive approach to build protective factors as a buffer system against adversity and pain (Terjesen, Jacofsky, Froh, & DiGiuseppe, 2004, apud. Ong, 2013). Positive education promotes increased emotional regulation and builds resilience, alleviates anxiety and stress, develops character strengths such as hope, kindness, social intelligence, self-control and perspective, leading to positive youth developmental outcomes (Park, 2004, apud. Ong, 2013).

School-wide Positive Behavioural Support

Sugai and Horner (2002) noticed that most school conduct codes and discipline handbooks detail consequence sequences designed to “teach” these students that they have violated a school rule, and that their “choice” of behaviours will not be tolerated. When occurrences of rule-violating behaviour increase in frequency and intensity, the solutions found in these handbooks are increased measures of monitoring and control, and *progressively intensification of sanctions and punishment*. Ironically, these measures, frequently, generate an increase in the intensity and frequency of antisocial behaviours and alter the socio-affective climate of the institutions, deteriorate the adult-child relations. These adverse effects have all psychological explanations, in any psychological paradigm. In behavioural terms, repeated sanctions/abuses will determine an accommodation in child, the desired outcomes soliciting harsher actions. Also, aggressive behaviour in adult determine aggressive behaviour in child, so we learn to exert force on smaller and weaker opponent. Cognitive paradigm explain how adverse early experience will form negative core beliefs. And humanistic approach explain how a sane human relation, in order to promote communication, learning, and development should be based on respect, non-conditional acceptance, the teacher should be a facilitator, the learning should be centred on the child (Rogers), education is meant to help child to develop a positive self-image (Comb), and to offer satisfaction (Maslow). Predilection to use reactive measures as a reaction of the organization or of the teacher/specialized member staff to an inappropriate behaviour could be explain by their association with relatively rapid reduction in serious problem behaviour. But this reduction is for short-term and it is preventing the development of sustained positive school climate. As an effect it is hindering the reduction of antisocial behaviours occurrence.

The more promising solution is the adoption of more proactive (positive and preventive) approaches to shape individual and school-wide discipline responses (Sugai&Horner, 2002).

The result has been the evolution of school-wide “positive behaviour support” (PBS), a broad range of systemic and individualized strategies for achieving important social and learning outcomes while preventing problem behaviour.

Positive behaviour support is the combination of four key elements:

- a. outcomes (e.g., academic achievement, social competence, employment options),
- b. a behavioural and biomedical science of human behaviour that provides fundamental principles for the design of support,

- c. empirically validated practices for achieving identified outcomes in applied contexts,
- d. the implementation of validated practices in the context of the systems change needed for durable and generalized effects. (Sugai et al., 2000, apud. Sugai & Horner, 2002).

The focus of Positive Behavioural Support is to respond to school/institution's need to support student behaviour, and this task is organized from a coherent perspective of four system: school-wide, classroom, non-classroom and individual student. (Lewis & Sugai, 1999; Sugai & Horner, 1999; Sugai et al., 2000, apud. Sugai & Horner, 2002).

Levels of intervention

The efficiency of an education/intervention system is evident in its outcomes: academic progress and the degree in which it develops desired behaviours, skills and attitudes. An important marker of the empirical value of an educational/remedial system is the decrease of inappropriate, antisocial behaviours, in frequency and severity, the reductions of conflictual events.

There are three phases in conflict prevention: early identification and resolution of basic causes of conflict, peace-making and interim action and post-conflict reconstruction. Traditionally, nations have concentrating on the last two phases, not in the first, the preventive (Kotite, 2012). But „the same species that invented war can invent peace” (UNESCO, 1989, Seville Statement on Violence, apud. Kotite, 2012).

Accordingly, in educational settings, there are three levels of interventions/preventions: primary, secondary and tertiary.

PBS relies on a continuum of behaviour support in which the intensity of behaviour support necessarily increases relative to increases in the behavioural needs and challenges of the student (Walker et al., 1996, apud. Sugai&Horner, 2002).

Primary universal intervention is preventive, aiming to prevent the conflict, the behavioural problems to appear. This prevention addresses to children and adolescent who do not present emotional and behavioural disorders, legal issues, and educates them how to develop appropriate, prosocial behaviours, and ways of avoiding antisocial behaviours. In PBS, the goal of primary prevention is to inhibit the development of problem behaviour by emphasizing the teaching and encouraging desired social behaviours, maximizing academic success, and removing the factors that promote and sustain problem behaviour.

Secondary intervention/prevention is the intervention designated for children and youth who do not manifest conduct disorders, but are prone/vulnerable to it, and are helped to developed prosocial skills in selected groups. In PBS, secondary prevention strategies focus on removing or reducing the impact of risk factors (e.g., poverty, unsafe neighbourhoods, lack of supervision) that students bring to school by bolstering the availability of protective factors (e.g., specialized community and/or school supports, remedial programming, family assistance).

Tertiary intervention/prevention is conducted after the crisis, and it aims to prevent complications (conflict escalation, for example) and to stop further development of the crisis. It takes place in case of installed disorders and troubles and has the objective of reducing the complications generated by the manifestations of the disorders (for example, legal issues, impact on youth functionality). Tertiary prevention is focused on reducing the complexity, intensity, severity of problem behaviours that become well-established in the behavioural repertoire of individual students.

The LSCI Method and PBS

Life Space Crisis Intervention (LSCI) is a recognized, professional training developed by Long, Wood and Fecser (2001). It is also a certification program for professionals working with children and adolescents, sponsored by the Life Space Crisis Intervention Institute of Hagerstown, Maryland, USA.

LSCI is an advanced, interactive therapeutic strategy for turning crisis situations into learning opportunities for children and youth with chronic patterns of self-defeating behaviours. This non-physical intervention program uses a multi-theoretical approach to behaviour management and problem solving. LSCI provides staff a roadmap through conflict to desired outcomes using crisis as an opportunity to teach and create positive relationships with youth.

LSCI supports PBS and offers valuable tools in implementing this system in schools and other remedial or residential settings. LSCI method is resonant with PBS in different ways:

- Provides a systematic, comprehensive approach to addressing escalating behaviour that can be used for students across all three tiers of the PBIS/RTI model as well as in special education settings;
- Systematically integrates evidence-based practices related to crisis prevention and intervention, behaviour management, cognitive behaviour modification, and prosocial skills training
- Provides school staff with proactive, consistent strategies for de-escalating crisis situations that can lead to reductions in suspensions and expulsions, as well as the use of restraint and seclusion;
- Uses incidents of problem behaviours to understand the issues underlying the self-defeating patterns of behaviour and re-teaches appropriate replacement behaviours, while promoting the development of positive, supportive relationships with school staff;
- Designed to give school staff and students an increased understanding of the function and other intrapersonal factors related to an ongoing pattern of problem behaviour, improving the effectiveness of function-based behaviour support plans.

LSCI views problems or stressful incidents as opportunities for learning, growth, insight, and change.

LSCI teaches staff the therapeutic talking strategies they will need to help children during stressful moments, as well as the awareness and skills to understand and manage their own feelings and counter-aggressive tendencies when intervening with aggressive or out-of-control behaviours. LSCI believes that the process of helping involves having the ability to listen deeply to the personal stories of children and youth and to recognize that their message often is not in their words but in their underlying thoughts and feelings. The real strength of the LSCI program is its emphasis on teaching, and practicing specific interviewing techniques to help staff and students debrief a problem situation or critical event (www.lsci.org).

The LSCI counselling method consist in six well-structured stages of intervention (Long&al., 2005). The first three stages, also named diagnostic stages, are:

- Stage 1: Drain off** – the moment of de-escalation of the crisis, when the counsellor offers space, time, support and understanding for the troubled child, in order to calm down and decrease the intensity of the emotions. When the emotional outburst diminished, the child becomes capable to focus on the event and to verbalize it, being introduced into the next stage.
- Stage 2: Timeline** – represents the moment when student describes in rational words his/her unique perception of the event and its contingencies (antecedents and consequences).
- Stage 3: Central Issue** – is attained when the counsellor have sufficient understanding of the event and of the student's perceptions and feelings and could decide what is the main issue of the previous event and which Reclaiming Intervention should be used.

The last three stages, named Reclaiming Stages, are the following:

- Stage 4: Insight** – has as main objectives to obtain from the student a new insight over his/her repetitive patterns of self-defeating behaviours and to convey to the student the possibility of change.
- Stage 5: New Skills** – consists in developing a „plan for success” for and with the student, by teaching pro-social skills and solving problems strategies.
- Stage 6: Transfer of learning** – deals with student's transition back into the group and into the daily routines, where to practice the newly acquired pro-social skills.

The authors of LSCI method (Long, Wood, Fecser) consider that there are six disturbing patterns of self-defeating behaviours that generates the conflicts in educational settings (and not only) (Long&al., 2005). For each of these patterns of undesirable reactions/behaviours, there are six reclaiming strategies:

The Reality Rub – implemented for students with blocked, wrong or restricted perceptions of reality, for students with private reconstruction of reality due to their cognitive schemata and cognitive distortions, or for students who try to manipulate reality to test limits.

The Red Flag – used in case of displacement of a problem from a setting to another setting or to another place or toward other person (imported problems).

The Symptom Estrangement is a strategy used when working with children comfortable with their deviant behaviours, who receive gratification from their aggressive behaviours and justify these behaviours in a guilty-free way.

The Massaging Numb Values is a strategy designated for students burdened by guilt and sorrows, who search punishment as a way of redemption.

The New Tools are addressed to students with good intentions (seeking approval of adults or peers) who lack the appropriate social behaviours to accomplish these.

The Manipulation of Body Boundaries is used to assist students who are isolated, rejected and who seek destructive friendships or students that are unwittingly set-up by passive-aggressive peers to act-out.

LSCI Training is a method designated to help adults interested in turning crisis situations into learning opportunities for children and youth with chronic patterns of self-defeating behaviours.

Teachers, school personnel, social workers, counsellors, youth care workers, administrators, psychologists, and any professionals in direct contact with troubled youth could gain from the advanced intervention skills developed through this method (www.lsci.org).

Conclusions

In conclusion, Positive Behaviour Support at school/organization level could and should be developed in order to implement an efficient and systematic policy of reducing disruptive behaviours and to nurture, at the same time, the further development of pupils. Life Space Crisis Intervention is an appropriate strategy in this kind of approach, but many other options are available.

There are three features of such PBS strategies: the orientation toward learning skills for conflict identification and resolution, the systematic and consistent implementation and assessment at school-wide level of the efficiency of positive behavioural support system, and the use of difficult situations as a context of learning.

From our experience, the use of LSCI at classroom level is effective, but the overall efficiency is increased by supporting and implementing it as a school policy.

Finally, implementing a wide-school positive behavioural support strategy is not only an educational option, a technical one, but an ethical statement of (re)educational institution, affirming its dedication in growing responsible adults. Such a statement is important for every school, but for re-education institution is even more important, because it shows that the institution overcome the obsolete model of educating by punishment.

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