ODR Data:

An Examination of Distribution and Discussion on Interventions

Susie Routes

Oregon State University

Assessment of the Individual

Lori Blackman

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**Introduction**

In a Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS)-oriented school, discipline referrals are an important data point to design and implement intervention. The PBIS team should examine the behavior data to assess areas in which students are in need of additional positive behavior approaches, on the school wide level, in small groups, or individually. Foster Elementary School, in Sweet Home Oregon is a school that utilizes the PBIS system. Below is a discussion of a need identified when analyzing the behavior data, and a proposed intervention.

**School Need: Lack of Distribution of Behavior Referrals**

Upon examining the office discipline referral (ODR) data, disproportionality was discovered: six students (about two-percent of the total student population) were attributed to 40% of the total ODR’s. This is an alarmingly large proportion of overall ODR’s and signifies a bias in ODR distribution, a lack in supports being provided to this group of students, or both.

**School Demographics**

Foster Elementary School is an elementary school located in the rural town of Foster, Oregon (just outside of Sweet Home). The student population is predominantly White (89%), with a small proportion of Hispanic/Latino (5%), multi-racial (3%), American Indian/Alaskan Native (2%), and Asian (1%) students. Currently, there are 312 students enrolled in the school. Twenty percent of the students have an individualized education plan. About 80% of the students enrolled are considered to be economically disadvantaged. The gender distribution of the students is about equal, with 45% of the students being female.

**Demographic Composition of Identified Students**

I will now discuss the demographics of the six students with high ODR rates. All of these students are White males. Because the majority of the students in Foster Elementary are white, this finding is not alarming. However, it is concerning that all six students are male, especially given that the overall proportion of male students at Foster is 55%. Another concerning finding is that four out of these students, or 66% of them are on an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), compared with the twenty percent of students on IEP’s in the larger student population. All of these students, except one have adequate attendance. In addition, five of the students, or 83% of them are considered economically disadvantaged, which is just over the economically disadvantaged rate of the overall student population.

One pattern I noticed with these students that could have influenced their referral rate relates to their home lives. Of the six students, two of them have been removed from the custody of their biological parents for abuse and neglect. All of the students except one (to my knowledge) have survived one of the ten adverse childhood experiences identified by the Children’s Resilience Initiative: emotional abuse; emotional neglect; child physical abuse, physical neglect; child sexual abuse; drug addicted or alcoholic family member; incarceration of a family member; loss of a parent to death or abandonment; mentally ill, depressed, or suicidal family member; or witnessing domestic violence against their mother (Children’s Resilience Initiative, n.d.). These past experiences will need to be considered when determining an intervention for the students.

**Validity and Reliability of ODR’s**

In order to determine the next step, the validity of Foster Elementary School’s ODR’s needs to be considered. One needs to consider if the ODR data is valid, or truly reflective of student behaviors, or if the data is skewed or biased. In addition, one needs to consider if the referral rate is reliable. If reliable, all staff members in the school would refer students for the same behaviors. They would also write all students up for the same behaviors, rather than targeting specific students for referrals and overlooking behaviors of other students.

When comparing the ‘red zone’ students with the general student population, some discrepancies arise. First of all, all seven students are male. Secondly, over half of the seven students are on IEP’s, which is a greater proportion than the larger population. Although concerning, however, it is typical for both students with disabilities and male students to be overrepresented in ODR data (Pas, Bradshaw, & Mitchell, 2011).

Another concern is that these seven students are simply receiving far more discipline referrals then other students in the school. It is hard to calibrate if this is because these students are having more frequent behavior struggles or if staff members are biased against these students and are thus more prone to write them up. Because there is not data on the frequency of other students behaving in similar ways, it is nearly impossible to determine for sure if this is a factor.

**Subjectivity of ORD’s.** Pas, Bradshaw, & Mitchell (2011) examined the validity of office discipline referrals, when utilized to identify students with behavioral problems. They identified a number of factors, outside of the student’s actual behaviors, that could influence this data. For example, they found that classroom and school factors, such as poverty, inconsistent teaching practices, lack of advanced training, and large classroom sizes could influence behavioral referral data. Foster Elementary School has both large classroom sizes and high poverty in the student population. In addition, they found that ODRs could be influenced by a student’s past history of ODR’s; a factor that could be very present in the behavioral data being examined. All in all, however, Pas, Bradshaw, & Mitchell (2011) found that referral data could be a valid source to use in identifying students in need of intervention or additional school supports. However, the authors caution that this should not be the only data examined.

**Proposed Interventions**

In this section, there will be a discussion of the interventions proposed to address this problem. First, there will be a discussion of how to ensure that ODR data is as reliable and valid as possible. Second, there will be an outline of the proposed direct interventions to assist this group of students in reducing the amount of referrals given to them.

**Calibration of Referrals and Responses with Staff**

An important factor in the success of a PBIS program is to calibrate what warrants a major ODR (McCray, Lecthenberger, & Wang, 2013). Currently, all referrals go through the principal, who assess their necessity and determines next steps. Although attention is being paid to the appropriateness of referrals, through the principal, ODR data could be more reliable if all staff members were reminded of what specific behaviors necessitate major ODR’s (Todd, Horner, & Tobin, 2010). The counselor will raise this question at the next PBIS team meeting, and definitions will be generated for major and minor office referrals. After the team has come to a definitive consensus on how to assign ODR’s, they will present this information at the next team meeting. In addition, a skill-building component should be worked into staff response to inappropriate behavior.

**Classroom-Based Interventions**

In addition to ensuring that the referral process is as unbiased and streamlined as possible, it will be important to assess the classroom environment is setting these students up for success, especially considering the fact that the classroom was one of the top two locations that the referral incidents occurred in (along with the playground). According to Pas, Bradshaw, & Mitchell (2011) classroom factors, such as a large class size, inconsistent teaching practices, and a lack of teacher training could all influence referral rates. These students are all a part of a large class and two of them are in the classroom of a first-year teacher. Thus, providing support to these teachers will be essential in setting students up for success. In addition, the teachers will have important information on what helps these students succeed and what their triggers may be, so having conversations with them about the interventions they have attempted and what worked and did not would be a great first step. Then together, the counselor and teacher could make a plan for each student in the classroom.

**Skill-Building Interventions**

According to the PBIS model, these six students, or two-percent of the overall student population at Foster, are considered ‘red zone’, in terms of their behavior. This means that the school needs to develop targeted and evidenced-based skill-building interventions for these students (Sherrod, Getc, & Ziomek-Diagle, 2009; McCray, Lechtenberger, & Wang, 2012).

**Narrative Counseling**

School discourse tends to highlight student deficits, particularly for students viewed as ‘behavior problems’. Theses students become stigmatized among school staff and they often internalize the deficit discourse being ascribed to them (Winslade & Monk, 2007). Narrative counseling interventions provide students with the opportunity to re author their identity and empower them to create the positive change they want and need to be successful at school (Kamali, & Yoosefi Looyeh, 2013). By externalizing the problem and encouraging students to weigh to cost and pay-off of behavior, students are able to think critically about problems and to generate an alternative narrative and course of action (Winslade & Monk, 2007). Narrative counseling has been found to be effective in reducing symptoms and behaviors in students with a variety of struggles, including those labeled as ‘oppositional defiant’, ‘learning disabled’, and ‘depressed’ (Kamali, & Yoosefi Looyeh, 2013).

**Small Group Interventions.** Social skills group interventions have been found to not only improve student social functioning but also to improve future mental health functioning and academic performance (Bostick & Anderson, 2009). Thus, implementing age-group-based counseling social skills groups is an evidence-based intervention to assist students in building social skills. In addition, Narrative Counseling is a format that is effective when implement in a small-group format (Winslade & Monk, 2007). The counselor will create and implement Narrative Counseling-oriented groups with these six students, according to their grade level and developmental level. The counselor will identify additional students to participate in these groups who are struggling in similar ways, according to ODR data and staff referral.

**Individual Interventions.** Small-group interventions may not be effective on all six students. Thus, it will be important for the counselor to track the effectiveness of the interventions (see section below) and assess further needs. Some students may need individual counseling interventions, in addition to small group interventions. The individual support given by the school counselor will also be given in Narrative Counseling format.

**Community Connections**

Finally, some students may need more extensive counseling services than the school counselor has time to provide. In this case, the school counselor would refer them to a community mental health provider. In addition, it is important to ensure that the basic needs of these students are met, especially when considering the fact that almost all of them are economically disadvantaged. Because the counselor has already had quite a bit of contact with these students, she has already referred several of them to community resources. For example, two of these students take home backpacks full of food every weekend. In addition, many of these students received winter clothing and/or shoes. The school counselor will make additional contact with these families to assess any further needs. If they seem to have several needs, she might refer them to the Youth Support Team (YST), a group of representatives from local community resources who meet with families to coordinate services.

**Tracking Success of Interventions**

As these interventions are being implemented, it is essential that the school counselor track their efficacy. As she tracks this data, she may need to adjust interventions to better suit the needs of the students.

**ODR Data**

Because the students were identified through ODR data and the interventions were geared specifically at altering ODR data, the school counselor must monitor this data for any changes. First, after re-calibrating the ODR process, she will track the data to see if referrals are more distributed among students. She will also examine the cause of ODRs, to monitor if staff members are writing them based on the calibration standards outlined. She will also track to see if the ODR data decreases or increases. Second, the school counselor will monitor the ODR data on the six students identified, to determine if the interventions are having desired impact.

**Student and Staff Data**

In addition to monitoring the ODR data, the counselor will track student and staff perceptions, to assess for efficacy of the interventions. Prior to making the skill building and classroom interventions, the counselor will administer surveys to both students and teachers, to assess their perceptions of behavior. The counselor will re administer the same surveys after making the small-group interventions. For more concrete data on the student’s behavior (as opposed to perception data), Gruman & Hoelzen (2011) recommend that school counselors utilize direct observation of students. Thus, the school counselor will administer structured direct observations of the students before and after interventions, to track for improvements or additional areas of need. If a student has not responded to an intervention (small group, for example), she will administer another intervention (individual work with the school counselor).

**Student Family Data**

The school counselor will maintain open lines of communication with the student’s parents, to monitor behavior changes at home. She will also follow up with families whom she has referred to community agencies, to monitor follow-through and helpfulness.

**Conclusion**

Behavioral data has the potential to provide school counselors and staff with powerful information, which can lead to targeted interventions, both school wide and to individual students. The proposed interventions for Foster Elementary School were geared at both calibrating school-wide ODR data and at assuring that struggling students had adequate support at school. The school counselor should continue monitoring data before, during, and after interventions, to assess their effectiveness and to determine next steps.

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