Behaviour at School Study

A framework for developing and enacting humane behaviour policies and practices in schools

Philosophy for enacting humane behaviour policies

- Reject deficit views of students and their families
- Ensure students are central to all decision making and action
- Promote a school culture with guiding principles based on core values

- Utilise key ideas from a variety of sources to inform policies and practices
- Demonstrate a genuine ethic of care for students and families
- Foster and maintain social and emotional wellbeing

- Establish and sustain educative relationships
- Involve students in relevant and rigorous learning through engaging pedagogies
- Commit to working through and resolving issues and challenges

Staffing to enact a collective philosophy

- Adopt strong and visible leadership approaches that promote learner engagement
- Build a profile of staff which embraces a humane behaviour philosophy
- Establish a collaborative leadership team to take collective responsibility for students and staff
- Challenge staff through professional learning to place students at the centre of humane behaviour policies
- Implement performance management processes to ensure all staff embrace a humane behaviour philosophy

Prioritising place and space

- Allocate resources to ensure spaces support the enactment of the school philosophy
- Design and arrange the physical environment to promote collaboration through engaging pedagogies
- Promote a sense of autonomy by creating more flexible and relaxed learning spaces
- Ensure the physical environment is appealing to promote a sense of belonging and connection
- Provide a communal space for community gatherings
- Utilise technologies to promote collaborative learning and teaching

Fostering an engaged and supportive school community

- Engage all members of the community to develop a sense of belonging
- Build and sustain relationships within the community
- Value diversity and promote a sense of connectedness and belonging
- Use a variety of positive and respectful communication strategies
- Use a common language to communicate policies and practices
- Enlist members of the school community to promote a positive profile of the school

Enacting humane behaviour policies and practices

- Challenge and educate staff to enact humane behaviour policies and practices
- Focus on engaging pedagogies rather than managing behaviours
- Ensure behaviour management practices are aligned with the school philosophy

- Collect and use data to inform and justify policies and practices
- Enact preventative and respectful behaviour policies
- Implement educative rather than punitive approaches to managing behaviour

- Use equitable rather than equal practices with students
- Adopt a range of problem solving and conflict resolution strategies

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Background

Behaviour in schools continues to attract political and public attention internationally as concerns about uncontrollable and disorderly students prevail. In Australia, federal and state governments have developed behaviour polices and laws that require schools to provide safe and orderly learning environments. Additionally, education systems and other authorities have developed policies, directives and procedures for schools to implement, or enact, to help 'control' student behaviour. These polices can be complementary or contradictory as they attend to problems like truancy, bullying, and school violence. Schools are left to make sense of this profusion of policies and enact them as particular programs and initiatives at the school level in ways to promote 'good' behaviour. Little research has investigated the ways schools reconcile contrasting behaviour policies and approaches in order to support student behaviour.

This study draws on policy enactment literature to help understand the complex work schools do to interpret, translate and enact behaviour related policies (Ball, et al., 2012). This view of policy enactment recognises that policy actors adopt different roles and that the context is very important in shaping this work. Furthermore, this study draws on insights from research on the micropolitics of schools to shed light on the strategies and tactics leaders use to influence policy development and enactment in their schools.

Aims

This framework was developed during a large Australian Research Council Linkage Project (LP110100317), 'Punish them or engage them? Identifying and addressing productive and unproductive student behaviours in South Australian schools'.

The research investigated the ways schools reconcile contrasting behaviour management approaches in order to support student behaviour and to develop and implement school policies that promote productive student engagement. More specifically, the research was guided by the following questions:

- How do schools interpret, reconcile and make decisions about what student behaviour research, legislation and advice to consider when developing local student behaviour policies?

- What micropolitical skills and understandings do they employ to do behaviour work?

Research Process

This research utilised in-depth case studies to investigate policy development and enactment work related to student behaviour in five schools in South Australia. Four types of data were collected: contextual information, policy texts, observations, and semi-structured and focus-group interviews with school leaders, teachers, and other staff.

Data analysis showed that there were some common themes across the case studies about how schools enacted student behaviour policies. Drawing together the common themes, this framework for developing and enacting humane behaviour policies and practices in schools has been developed.

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