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# Can School-Wide Positive Behavior Support Be an Evidence-Based Practice?

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# Can School-Wide Positive Behavior Support Be an Evidence-Based Practice?



POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORT INITIATIVE

*Walk the Peaceable Walk*

*by Tyler L. Renshaw, K. Richard Young, Paul Caldarella, & Lynnette Christensen*



# Preface

## Format

- Present foundational ideas (25 min.)
- Discussion (25 min.)

## Presentation Outline

- The Original Question
- A Possible Problem
- Two Underlying Assumptions
- Our New Question
- A Possible Solution
- Our Conclusions



# The Original Question

“Is SWPBS an evidence-based practice (EBP)?”  
(e.g., Horner & Sugai, 2007)

## Why ask This?

- Scientific evidence increasingly drives policy and practice (e.g., Feurer, Town, & Shavelson, 2002)
- EBP status could influence the funding and adoption of SWPBS—both nationally and internationally!



# The Original Question

**“Is SWPBS an Evidence-Based Practice?”**

**Thus . . .**

- ***It's important***
- ***It's logical***
- ***It's convenient***

**However . . .**

- **This doesn't mean it's *infallible***
- **There are underlying *assumptions* that need to be examined**



## A Possible Problem

We've yet to consider the *assumptions* underlying the question.

### **At Least Two Assumptions**

- *SWPBS is a “practice”*
- *As such, it fits within the EBP paradigm*

### **Chronologically Appropriate Questions**

- *Is SWPBS a “practice”?*
- *Does SWPBS fit within the EBP Paradigm?*
- *Is SWPBS an EBP yet?*
- *What's needed to get SWPBS to EBP status?*



# Two Underlying Assumptions

#1: SWPBS is a “practice.”

## What's a “Practice”?

- There's no authoritative definition in the literature
- Dictionary: *n.* “The actual application or use of an idea, belief, or method as opposed to theories about such [use]”

## Implications

- SWPBS is an application of theories, ideas, and methods
- So, yes, it can be termed a “practice”!



## Two Underlying Assumptions

#2: As a practice, SWPBS fits within the EBP Paradigm.

### What it Take to Be an EBP

- **First, meet macro-criteria—to ensure replicability**
  - Specificity and consistency across 5 domains: (1) procedures, (2) settings, (3) personnel, (4) populations of interest, and (5) expected outcomes (e.g., Sugai & Horner, 2007)
- **Second, meet micro-criteria—to ensure empirical rigor**
  - Clinical/counseling psychology (e.g., Chamberless & Hollon, 1998)
  - School psychology (e.g., Kratochwill & Shernoff, 2004)
  - Education (e.g., Odom et al., 2005; What Works Clearinghouse)





# Our New Question

## Can SWPBS be an EBP?

### Necessary Analysis

- **Step #1: Breakdown SWPBS into it's fundamental parts**
- **Step #2: Check congruency of parts with macro-criteria**
- **If the parts are congruent, then SWPBS *can* be and EBP (but this doesn't mean it *will or must* be)**

### Step #1: Fundamental Parts of SWPBS

- **“Guiding elements” (e.g., Sugai & Horner, 2006)**
- **3-tiered continuum of support (e.g., Turnbull et al, 2002)**
- **“Core elements” (Sugai & Horner, 2007)**



# Our New Question

Can SWPBS be an EBP?

## Step #2: Congruency Check With Macro-Criteria

- Procedures—No
- Settings—Yes
- Personnel—Maybe
- Populations—Yes
- Outcomes—No

## Implication

- 2 Yes + 2 No + 1 Maybe = SWPBS is not yet an EBP



# A Possible Solution

Reconceptualize SWPBS (outside of the EBP Paradigm).

**But First, What about Revamping SWPBS to Make it Fit?**

- It's fundamental parts are incompatible with the criteria
- Changing the fundamental parts changes the function
- We don't want to change the function!

**How Could it be Reconceptualized?**

- *As more than a practice: a “student-support framework”*
- *Dictionary: n. “A skeletal structure designed to support or enclose something.”*



## A Possible Solution

Reconceptualize SWPBS (outside of the EBP Paradigm).

### Why's "Student-Support Framework" a Good Fit?

- **Contextually flexible**—allowing for school differences
- **Focuses on *processes over intervention procedures***
- ***It isn't the means itself; it's the structure supporting the means***
- ***Dictates how EBPs and other practices are used***
- ***It employs the EBP paradigm (and thus encompasses it)***



# A Possible Solution

Reconceptualize SWPBS (outside of the EBP Paradigm).

## Real-Life Implications (Beyond Semantics)

- **Possible Setbacks**

- Negating previous literature and current research programs
- Hampering the funding and adoption of SWPBS

- **Possible Benefits**

- Allows for a conceptual focus on improving the framework itself
- Saves time in the long-run (impossibility of empirical validation)
- Allows for research to focus on social validity and fidelity
- Allows for research to focus on validating particular intervention and prevention efforts (potential EBPs) to be used in this framework



## Our Conclusions

- SWPBS is not yet an EBP
- SWPBS can be reconceptualized (outside of the EBP paradigm) as a “student-support framework”
- As a framework, it can employ the EBP paradigm
- This reconceptualization may have real-life implications: setbacks and benefits



# Discussion

So, what do *you* think?



## POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORT INITIATIVE

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