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?

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 its fundamental parts
• Step #2: Check congruency of parts with macro-criteria
• If the parts are congruent, then SWPBS can be an 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?
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