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

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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 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?
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