



In response to the challenge of defiant and violent behaviors, many school systems have increased their use of punishment-based and exclusionary policies. The underlying assumption is that this “get tough” approach will communicate to students that deviant behavior will not be tolerated and that punishment will promote more pro-social behavior. Ironically, these responses have resulted in the creation of more negative, adversarial, and hostile school environments.²³

Research on programs for hard-to-serve students differentiates between three basic program types.²⁴ Type I is based on the educational ideology that school should be challenging and fulfilling, using instructional innovations and creativity to engage and motivate students. This approach relies on students’ choice and voluntarism.

By contrast, Type II is a more punitive approach where students are “sentenced” to the program because of misbehavior. This is a “boot camp” orientation in which success means getting out of the program.

Type III is more compassionate in orientation with the objective of providing students with academic remediation and/or behavioral rehabilitation. As the metaphor for Type II is jail, for Type III it is therapy. Unlike Type I, the latter two assume something is wrong with the student, which may be academic, emotional, or social.

The efficacy of Type II schools is questionable. Their main objectives are to rid conventional schools of the disruptive youngsters and secondarily to punish them in order to improve their behavior. Analysis across school districts in Florida where Type II alternative placements were used showed no correlation between the existence of such programs and the local levels of drop-out, corporal punishment, suspension, or expulsion.²⁵ The Type II strict-discipline approach had not influenced the problems it had been adopted to resolve.

Type III has demonstrated greater efficacy. These programs stress personal, social, and emotional development as well as remediation and academic upgrading. They are typically small, supportive, and provide positive student/adult relationships and considerable individualized attention. Student behavior tends to improve, learning gains are achieved. There is an increase in attendance with fewer disciplinary incidents.

Program Philosophy

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