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Elementary School Male Aggression: Framing Aggression Reduction Programs for Effectiveness

Jamel A. Gibson[1] iD

[1] Administrator Carver Elementary School Newport News, VA

Abstract

This study explores the use of framing techniques to help educators, administrators, and leaders to determine the effectiveness of programs designed to reduce elementary school male aggression.

Keywords: Male aggression, Elementary school male aggression, Framing, Aggression reduction programs.

Contents

1. Introduction

Empirical evidence suggests that aggression and violence at the elementary school level is associated with school failure, school dropout rates, job failure, crime, and incarceration (van Lier *et al.*, 2007; Larson, 2008; Trussell, 2008; Risser, 2013; Gibson, 2015). Violent and aggressive behavior undermines the integrity of the learning environment, interferes with student academic and social outcomes, contributes to staff and student stress, and threatens school safety (Holmes *et al.*, 2014). To address this concern, prevention programs are necessary to assist elementary school males control and self-monitor violent behavior. Many programs have been established to prevent further development of aggressive behavior. These programs may benefit from additional information on how to address aggressive behavior effectively at the elementary school level. Framing programs by identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, and challenges may help to address this concern (Bolman and Deal, 2008).

2. Male Aggression

Aggressive student behavior is a national problem (Gibson, 2015). As problematic as this is, there appears to be a higher percentage among males of acts of aggression and physical fights in comparison to female students (National Center For Education Statistics, 2011). Dunn and Baker (2002) reported that male students comprise 70% of school suspensions, are three times more likely to become drug and alcohol abusers, receive greater behavioral penalties than do girls, and suffer from mental, emotional, or behavioral disorders. Gurian and Stevens (2004) stated that boys make up 90% of all school discipline problems. Gibson (2015) noted that boys comprise the majority of discipline referrals in elementary school. These manifestations of the continuing problem of male aggression contribute to the school-to- prison pipeline, and schools remain challenged by disaffected male students, and personality disorders.

Male aggressive behaviors are most likely to be manifested through the actions of defiance, classroom disruption, inappropriate language and gestures, physical altercations and confrontations, disrespect, insubordination, and mass assault (Gibson, 2015). Because of aggressive and violent behavior, homicide rates among youth are higher in the United States when compared to other countries with similar economies. In 2006, homicide was the fourth leading cause of death among 5-9 year olds, and the third cause of death among 10-14 year olds. Hostile school behavior produces more student threats, attacks, injuries, violent and non-violent crime, discipline concerns, gang activity, bullying, and many other negative actions (Enescu, 2012). Aggressive behavior has the potential to become violent in the classroom setting and may stimulate unfriendly outbursts among male students.

Moore and Pepler (2006) observed that in 2005, 11% of students between the ages of 8 and 17 started confrontations and fights with hate word statements, and verbal abuse was more likely than other kinds of abuse to affect children. These words included insults relating to race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual preference, and disabilities. Urban students reported being called hate words, specifically in the Black and Hispanic populations, at a considerably higher rate than other races (Basch, 2011). Verbal aggression is a strong catalyst for violence in elementary school; and if not addressed early, may lead to increasingly vicious acts of violence (Moore and Pepler, 2006). Student aggressive behavior is problematic in the K-12 school setting, and male student aggression is particularly challenging (Gibson, 2015). For example, Ozkol *et al.* (2011) proposed that aggression among young males is a critical public health issue impacting individuals, schools, communities, families, and the world. Disruptive behavior problems in young males is commonplace and if left unaddressed can lead to antisocial behaviors, multiple mental health issues, and personality problems in later life (Broyden *et al.*, 2007).

3. Framing

There is a need for male aggression prevention programs in the elementary school setting because many school districts are disproportionate in the suspension of elementary school males (Gibson, 2015). Although programs exist to help reduce male aggression, a large number of school-based aggression and violence prevention programs remain unevaluated. As a result of this ongoing concern, programming designed to address elementary school male aggression may benefit from utilizing framing techniques to assist in the assessment, development, and redevelopment of programs (Bolman and Deal, 2008).

Frames are a mental model and a set of ideas and assumptions to help understand what is occurring within programs (Bolman and Deal, 2008; Scherff and Singer, 2008). Frames also consider patterns and interpretations used to organize meaning and can help define problems, diagnose causes, make judgments, and suggest solutions for the issue (Achinstein and Barrett, 2004). Framing techniques help leaders and administrators to realize what they are facing and how they can address problems (Bolman and Deal, 2008). Many elementary school male aggression prevention programs are not focused on understanding the mechanisms that help to monitor effectiveness (Dymnicki *et al.*, 2011). Therefore, framing may be a powerful technique used to determine the effectiveness of elementary school male aggression reduction programs.

In most effective aggression and violence prevention programs, there is still uncertainty of exactly which components of the program are effective. In fact, research of school-based programs created to prevent aggressive behaviors in students, have documented inconsistent effects (Wilson *et al.*, 2003). Framing helps administrators and leaders to better gain a full understanding of what works and what needs to be eliminated within organizations and programs (Bolman and Deal, 2008). Applying the research on framing and reframing techniques can help administrators understand relationships among teachers, climate, and the organization of schools (Scherff and Singer, 2008). According to Bolman and Deal (2008) there are four distinct frames regarding reframing programs and organizations comprised of structural, human resource, political, and symbolic frames. Understanding the idea of framing can offer significant clues in capturing a comprehensive picture of the effectiveness of aggression and violence prevention programs. Table 1 below highlights the main function of each frame.

Table-1. Framing Techniques

Frame	Function
Structural Frame	The structural frame highlights goals of the program, identifies specialized roles to enhance performance, and discusses formal relationships regarding coordination through authority, policies, and rules.
Human Resource Frame	The human resource frame addresses the needs of the program
Political Frame	The political frame helps to determine how leadership will choose the agenda objectives for the program to follow
Symbolic Frame	In the symbolic frame, inspiration is the most important part of a leaders job

Source: Bolman and Deal (2008)

Assessing aggressive and violence prevention programs for elementary school males through structural framing may provide deeper insight into the core of the program. The structural frame highlights goals of the organization, identifies specialized roles to enhance performance, and discusses formal relationships regarding coordination through authority, policies, and rules (Achinstein and Barrett, 2004). The structures should be designed to fit the programs cirumstances. There is an increasing recognition in violence prevention research, for the need to determine under what conditions programs are effective (Dymnicki *et al.*, 2011). If the structural assumptions are properly designed, they can address both collective goals and individual differences within organizations (Bolman and Deal, 2008). Lack of a strong structure frame can cause an entire program to waste needed resources and energy (Bolman and Deal, 2008). An effective structural frame requires strong communication, realigning and in some instances renegotiation of policies and patterns.

The human resource frame addresses the needs of the aggression prevention program for elemntary males (Achinstein and Barrett, 2004). Programs are created to serve human needs and there is a need for programs to target social-cognitive processes that support aggressive responses in children (Dymnicki *et al.*, 2011). It is crucial for the leadership of these programs to pay attention to human resource issues because the quality of service offered depends on the caliber of employees (Hwang and Kogan, 2003). Effective program leaders possess the ability to improve the overall educational environment through means of proper designation of job roles (Dymnicki *et al.*, 2011). When the human resource frame is not effective, both the workers and the organization itself will be exploited (Bolman and Deal, 2008). A strong human resource system, including recruiting, hiring, and retention can enhance the aggression reduction program's worth (Hwang and Kogan, 2003).

The political frame operates under the assumption that leaders must acknowlegde that politics exist within programs. Moreover, understanding how to manage politics within aggression reduction programs for elementary school males is imperative for the program (Bolman and Deal, 2008). Operating from a political frame perspective requires strategy and helps to determine how leadership will choose agenda objectives for the program to follow (Bentley *et al.*, 2004). Agendas within aggression prevention programs are essential to the training of educators and leaders to obtain success (Girard *et al.*, 2011). Political frames assist in promoting effective employee work flow for a shared agenda to defeat common enemies.

The symbolic frame may also prove to be helpful in monitoring the effectiveness of aggression prevention programs. In the symbolic frame, inspiration is the most important part of a leader's job (Bolman and Deal, 2008). Obtaining a common symbolic goal, such as reducing elementary school male aggression, can help promote unity to share effective tools and professional development ideas (Girard *et al.*, 2011). Bolman and Deal (2008) also stress that common symbols penetrate through every fiber of society. The symbolic frame widens the possibilities for leadership because it's not restricted by formal authority and power, but is able to permeate the culture of the organization (Hill, 2011). Effective aggression reduction programming for elementary school males will require a united front on all levels. The symbolic frame is a helpful technique because it unites everyone towards a common goal (Hill, 2011). This erases distinctions between leaders and followers while raising possibilities for creativity and diminishing feelings of inferiority (Hill, 2011).

4. Conclusion

It would be beneficial for the leaders of aggression reduction programs for males on the elementary school level to identify strengths, weakness, opportunities, threats and challenges as a cohesive unit (Fernandez and Rainey, 2006). Programs are often reflective of its stakeholders, and are created and function based on public value and validity. Fernandez and Rainey (2006) noted the one-size-fits-all approach does not work when managing change, since each change and each affected group is different. There are many areas and pathway possibilities that program leaders can utilize to determine program effectiveness and worth. Leaders that utilize framing as a technique to maintain, refine, and shape the future of aggression reduction programs for elementary males may find value in further research (Fernandez and Rainey, 2006).

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