Content of and attitudes towards an intervention program.

School administrators’ and students’ perceptions

Author: Rosemary Garvey
Abstract

The aim of the study is to examine how one administration in a school with above average national test results works to reduce student behavior problems and promote a functional environment in one English speaking school in Stockholm, Sweden.

The methods used are a case study of one school with interviews and a questionnaire. The grades the students received were compared to the national average and the school environment for the students and administration was reviewed.

The results are based on the relationship between a strong administration and a positive school environment as described by the participants. Finally the interventions realized in that school were contrasted with the interventions outlined and suggested in the current literature.

The conclusion is that the research done for this study suggests that there is a relationship between a strong administration and children performing well on standardized tests. It also suggests that both the students and the administration, under these circumstances, feel good about school.

**Keywords:** behavior problems, behavior management, problem children, disruptive pupils, assertive discipline
Table of Contents

1. Introduction 2
   1.1. Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Model 4
   1.2. Outline for an ISP (Individualized Service Plan) 6
   1.3. Environment Surrounding the Child 8
   1.4. Impact of the Administration and/on the Team 11

2. Aim 14
   2.1. Research Questions 14

3. Methods 14
   3.1. Background 14
   3.2. Research Design 15
   3.3. Rationale for the Study 16
   3.4. Participants 17
   3.5. Material 18
   3.6 Interviews 19
   3.5 The Survey 20
   3.6 Data Analysis 21
      3.6.1 Accuracy of research methods 21

3 Results 23
   3.6 Table 1: Grades Comparison 2005 28
   3.7 Table 2: Summary of Survey from the School in Stockholm, Sweden 29

4 Discussion and Conclusions 29
1. Introduction

The reason I am writing this paper on this particular subject is my lack of comprehension of the stigmas or labels attached to children in school with little solid information to support them. It disturbs me that there is so much bullying and stealing and fighting in the schools. It disturbs me that there is so much problem behavior in schools and there aren’t uniform school policies that give specific guidelines for handling these problematic situations. It is also disturbing that the administrators themselves can not agree on what their role is in the success/failure of a school.

There also seems to be many children considered “problem” children that are assigned labels such as Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), Attention Deficit and Hyper Activity Disorder (ADHD), etc. It’s disturbing that often a child is labeled and then frequently set aside because conduct disorder is considered a product of bad parenting or simply as a product of the environment, such as an outcome of poverty or ethnic minority status. (Gerten, 2000). One reason for the confusion could be that as there is so much disagreement amongst the experts themselves on what a proper definition is for the various types of conduct disorders. Even the two most prominent diagnostic manuals, The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV) and The International Classification of Diseases and Related Problems (ICD-10), can’t agree or even really define what a conduct disorder is. They define symptoms, which by any definition, is extreme problem behavior.

Another possibility in that both the school and the parents are too tired or overworked or apathetic to try to sort out the problem that maybe it’s just easier to label a child and wash one’s hands of it. The child’s behavior becomes a “thing” so therefore one can throw up their hands and say,” I tried my best but my child or the child is ADD or ADHD, what can I do”? With the exception of extreme behavior, many of these labels are entirely subjective and can be the result of a child not fitting in with what the school, the teacher or community thinks is normal or acceptable behavior. Sometimes, if the competition is intense, mobbing/bullying can be perceived as assertive rather then just bad behavior or stealing viewed as an equalizer. Other possibilities are the child may have self esteem problems, which can create a dynamic of bullying or being bullied, and as a result of this other behavior problems can manifest themselves. It could also be other environmental factors such as death, divorce or the birth of a new sibling. Usually the people who are living or working in the child’s immediate
environment create the environment and subsequently the standards for behavior. The first step is to attempt to define what a “conduct disorder” or the symptoms of a conduct disorder.

It can be said that disruptive behavior disorders are identified by a group of symptoms, characterized by a short attention span, impulsive, poor concentration, restlessness and hyperactivity. (Gaoni, Couper, Black and Baldwin, 1998.). However, this can also possibly be related to the emotional development of the child. Maturity takes time and growing out of different phases of a young life may seem to take forever particularly when a child is a “late bloomer” but neither drug nor therapy is going to speed up this process. It can get more extreme but that heads into the realm of aggression, this is different and actually more dangerous for the child and the people surrounding the child.

The two major diagnostic classification manuals, (DSM-IV) and (ICD-10), do not have a specific category for childhood behavioral disorders. The manuals have classifications such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD); conduct disorder (CD) and opposition defiant disorder (ODD) but the validity and reliability of the diagnostic categories used in these manuals has been the subject of many debates. For example, the definition of conduct disorder, used by DSM IV, includes behaviors such as aggression to people and animals, destruction of property, deceitfulness or theft and serious violations of rules. Furthermore, these behaviors must persist over time and across settings. Gerten uses Gaoni’s 1998 reference to the conduct disorder label as the psychiatric equivalent of the legal term “delinquent” (2000, p.1). The authors of DSM-IV have recognized that ADHD can evolve into CD or OCD or there is just the presence of CD or OCD (Gaoni et al. 1998). But the trend since the nineties is towards a Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA). However this is primarily for handicapped children so although a Behavior Support Plan (BSP) or Individualized Service Plan (ISP) may be recommended it isn’t always necessary or practical as they are expensive, requires the time of many professionals and may be altogether unnecessary when talking about behavior problems in a school.

In an effort to streamline the process Wingfield took selected items from Pisecco’s 1999 Student Behavior Survey (SBS) to develop her own shortened version for identifying disruptive behavior. Wingfield states that, the process of identifying whether a student shows symptoms of emotional and behavior problems is difficult with the lack of specific guidelines as to exactly what is a problem. Depending on the nature of the concerns parents, teachers and the youth may all hold discrepant opinions on a) whether a problem exists and b) the nature
and severity of the problem. The assessment process is further complicated by the absence of gold standard assessment measures. Wingfield further indicates that there are different, shorter “objective behavior rating scales” are easier and cheaper to administer. The rating scales are easy to administer, inexpensive, accurate and allow for systematic comparisons across informants (teachers, parents and students) (2002, p.90). Wachs also reinforces this with the fourth principal from his book, Necessary, but not Sufficient; one must “build on specificity when designing interventions”. (2000, p.323).

1.1. **Bronfenbrenners Ecological Model**

I am following one administration’s policies and the implementation of a model that is an easy, understandable guide is Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Model. His model describes four different but interconnected systems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem (1992, 1994).

The only exception I take is his placement of the “cultural repertoire for belief systems” that he places in the macro system. It is my opinion that this belongs in both the micro system and macro system because what you learn at home and what the traditions are from a culture have a great impact. Most societies are becoming more integrated every year, and the differences between the value system at home and the value system of the society they are living in needs to be given equal consideration when considering a child’s frame of reference.

However, in 1996 Joanne Curry Sontag wrote a particularly understandable and comprehensive overview of Bronfenbrenner’s model which I will use as my guideline. A brief description of all four systems are described below although it can be helpful to use the imagery of a nested set of Russian doll’s (Sontag 1996) when imagining how the model looks and how the interaction works between the various systems. We begin with the microsystem:

**Microsystem**

The most intimate level which consists of “patterns of activities, roles and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given face to face setting with particular physical and material features and containing other persons with distinctive characteristics of temperament, personality and systems of belief (Sontag1996,p.328). Ex: family/teacher/peers and the child. “Characteristics of the microsystem are:
1. The phenomenological view that is the individuals’ perception of the environmental properties that exert the most influence on development in ecological theory.
2. The temperament, style and mannerisms of the various caregivers whether they are parents and/or teachers with whom the child interacts.

**Mesosystem** *

The second level of the hierarchy of systems, which “comprises the interrelations among 2 or more settings in which the developing person actively participates (relations among school, home and neighborhood peer group). This includes two or more microsystems.

There are four general types of interconnections between the home and school setting:

1. Multi setting participation where the child engages in activities in more then one setting. The child goes to school and of course is at home. This is a prerequisite for the mesosystem. This is a first order social network.
2. Indirect linkage when the child is not actively participating but the child has an intermediary, such as a parent, who establishes the link with between the two settings (such as school and home, parent /teacher). This is a second order network.
3. Inter-setting communications this is, “messages being transmitted from one setting to the other with the express purpose of providing specific information”. For example school newsletters and correspondence.
4. Inter-setting knowledge “Information and experiences that participants in one setting have about the other”. This can be obtained from many sources ex: from neighbors about the school or teachers.

**Exosystem** *

This is,” the linkage and processes taking place between two or more settings at least one of which does not ordinarily contain the developing person”. However, the events taking place at this level influence processes within the immediate setting that affect the child for example, the relationship between the mother and her work place. Mom has trouble at work, comes home cranky and is impatient with the child.

* For Exo and Meso systems Sontag references Bronfenbrenner’s original 1979 model emphasized the importance of mutual trust, a positive orientation and goal agreement between
the linking person (parent) and the non-home environment (teacher). This core philosophy has remained constant with all the future expansions on this model (1996).

Macrosystem

The fourth level of the hierarchical environmental system.

“This is the societal blueprint for a particular culture, subculture or other broader social context”. (Bronfenbrenner 1992).

A feature of the macrosystem that needs particular attention is “a cultural repertoire for belief systems”. This suggests that, “the belief systems of the of the significant others in the child’s world create a context that defines and determines the goals, risks and practices for raising each generation of children” (Sontag, 1996).

Thus the need and desire to be normal takes on great importance when judging a child or family according to the societal norms. According to Walsh “normal” is socially constructed. It’s constructed by dominant groups, reified by religion or science and used to pathologize or oppress others who do not fit into ideal standards (Walsh, 2002). In other words, a stigma attaches to the entire family and usually takes the involvement of the school and the family to sort a particular problem out. The behavior of the child, right or wrong, reflects on the parents and the entire family.

However, there are certain criteria that should be met in order to do any assessment of a child. Here is an overview of a formal Individualized Service Plan:

1.2. Outline for an ISP (Individualized Service Plan)

An Individualized Service Plan’s (ISP’s) is for the child who is having recurring problem behavior that the initial intervention steps have not helped. Although an ISP is a grand idea it isn’t always practical due to time and budget constraints but a school philosophy and well organized set of interventions that are consistent can compensate for these shortfalls. Here is a description of what should be in an ISP for a child is and who should be involved.

An ISP team in the public schools in the United States has, by law, 1) the child’s teacher, 2) an agency representative responsible for providing services, if appropriate 3) the
parent’s of the child 4) the child, if appropriate 5) psychologist or other individuals with relevant experience. The responsibility for implementing these programs in a school setting typically falls to the child’s teacher. If there needs to be help from the outside then the implementation of these programs typically falls to the mother. The criteria to be considered in selecting annual goals are 1) the child’s past achievements 2) the child’s current performance, 3) the practicality of goals and needs of the child, 4) time required to attain the goals (Simeonsson and Rosenthal, 2001).

However, it’s how the assessments are written which is more important then just following procedures. In a thorough and informative technical brief written by (Horner, Lewis-Palmer, Sugai, and Todd, 2000), the behavior plan defines what “we” do differently and how we will know if our efforts to change have been effective in changing student behavior. Behavior plans are seen as documents that provide professional accountability and increase the consistency with which a team of adult’s implements a support plan.

Horner again states that one of the first things to identify is the positive contributions the child is making or has made. An effective plan or a Behavior Support Plan (BSP) is included in the individualized service plan and builds on the good things that the child does or the child’s strengths. The second, are the operational definitions, this is the belief that the investment in the child is going to assist the child in changing its behavior in a positive way. However, the most important step is to agree on all the problems that currently serve as barriers to inclusion and an effective education. The two most common mistakes in defining problem behaviors are a) define only one behavior when many are problematic and b) to describe behavior as an internal state (angry, violent) or as diagnostic categories rather then as an observable event (punches walls when angry, swears at the teacher). The other factors that should be included is how often does this behavior occur (frequency) where it occurs (locus) and what it looks like (topography), how long it occurs (duration), how strong it is (intensity) and how long it takes for it to occur (latency). It’s also very important that the entire team agrees on what behavior(s) are targeted. They also must agree what behaviors they will try to address first or which behaviors need to be addressed at the same time. (2000)

The third step is deciding on what are the “problem routines”. This is the context in which the behavior takes place or is triggered by a certain event or events. There also are times and places where the child is calmer or not as difficult; this could be the time for the intervention to begin.
The fourth step is doing a Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA). This can be simple or very complex. For the purposes of this paper the FBA shall be quite simple. The most common approach is interviewing the student and the people who know the child/student. An effective assessment typically surround problem routines with a brief overview of what the student does the environment or conditions that are likely to trigger the unwanted behavior and what actions help maintain the unwanted behavior. Observations are effective at this point to confirm what is included in the summary statement. The observations can give specific examples of what behaviors the student exhibits, how the people in the immediate environment react and what is the payoff for the student where they get their own way thus reinforcing the behavior.

The fifth and final step is redesigning the environment is another way to assist a child onto a path of success. But one must keep in mind that any part or the entire BSP or ISP whatever you want to call it is not developed to “change” the child but rather to change the way the child interacts with its environment, the adults and peers in it. This step is how the adults and peers in the child’s environment change the way they interact with the child, thus creating a change in the child’s behavior.

Horner et al. (2000) concludes there are a few sub elements that should also be included. The first is to learn how the student perceives or experiences events in his or her environment. The second is to make the effort into preventing unwanted behavior to reoccur. The third is to include an instructional objective. This means teach the student different skills for adapting and interacting with his/her environment successfully. The fourth is to not reward unwanted behaviors. Meaning don’t give the child the payoff they’re looking for by not making them complete a task they don’t want to do or whatever the situation is that the child does not want to do what is being asked of him/her. Conversely the child should be rewarded for good behavior and it should be immediate. The sixth and final element is to have the know how to handle the most difficult situations. This means teaching the staff or the parents and preferably both how to handle the child when s/he are displaying their worst or most disturbing behavior.

1.3. Environment Surrounding the Child

If we look at a disruptive child or children’s environment we begin by looking at the classroom. This type of child disrupts the classroom and creates discipline problems for the
teacher. According to McManus and Gettinger (in Cone, Fulton and Van Nieuwenhuyse, 2000) the problem student is a major concern for teachers because they frequently disrupt the classroom. They quote who state that there is a need for appropriate social skill instruction. From their research they found that students with inappropriate social skills were found to have poor listening habits had trouble following instructions and had difficulty staying on task. The research also suggested these students exhibited low self-esteem.

In today’s classroom for a child to be successfully disruptive they need an audience and this means the other children are focusing on him/her/them instead of on the tasks and the teacher. It also means that the school itself needs to have protocols in place to be able to systematically cope with the disruptive child. To have these interventions be successful there needs to be a transactional relationship between the school and the parents/community. According to the Sheldon and Epstein longitudinal study, although inconclusive, there is compelling evidence that targeted family and community involvement may influence the behavior of the children in a positive way. They state that regardless of their prior level of disciplinary actions, schools that improved the quality and used more practices, from one year to the next, to communicate with families reported lower percentages of students sent to the principal’s office, received in school suspensions and/or detention. (2002).

Antoniadis and Videlock’s build on other researcher’s descriptions and characteristics of a team and what that can entail. A team is defined as an, “interaction among a group for the purpose of achieving an outcome” (1991, p.158). The paper also concludes based on accessing other research that there are three variables that are the basis of effective teamwork. First is task interdependence, “this is the degree to which team members must interact in pursuit of a goal”. Second is outcome interdependence, “this involves the extent to which team members share in the consequence of their efforts,” Third is potency, this is “the teams belief that they have the skills and the environmental support to accomplish the task” (1991, p.158-159).

One must also understand that there are many things happening to a child through his/her interaction with their peers, parents, and their environment, which can make a child vulnerable. One seemingly small incident, Wachs states, can have a Butterfly Effect and alter many aspects of a child’s life. If it’s a positive change then it’s wonderful and the influence can help a child on his/her way. But, if the small thing is negative then it can cause tremendous strain and pressure on the child. According to Wachs, this can thrust a child into
a different niche or make the world he/she lives in feel unstable. This covariant linkage between an event and an outcome suggests that although it’s possible, possibly even probable, depending on the moderating variable, there is no guarantee there will be the same outcome each time a certain set of events occur (2000). In other words, children react differently to similar situations. According to Sontag, in 1992 Bronfenbrenner stated it differently. He called it “development in context”, which is the influence of the variables in a child’s environment that influences the education experience and future of the child (1996).

For example, the act of bullying or being the one bullied is a situation that greatly worries administrators, parents and children alike. The long-term effects of bullying can be devastating. According to Wachs there is temporal discontinuity when there are “differences in the speed at which influences function” (2000, p.192). If a child is being bullied, although the event itself may only last a few minutes, few months or longer, the effects can last much longer. The time devoted to being afraid or embarrassed can be much longer and the resulting loss of self-esteem and self worth can last a lifetime, their reality can be one of insecurity and shame.

However, this is neither to minimize nor rationalize the problem of discipline in schools and in the classrooms. If there is a problem with the team then it reflects back on the classroom and school environment. According to Flury teachers cite discipline, at the public schools, as the number one classroom problem (2000). Thus when legislators or school boards develop a Code of Conduct for Students one would think that everyone would be behind it and it would be an immediate success. This is not necessarily the case because the primary problem is trying to define “misconduct”. The Code addresses students who bring weapons, alcohol; drug’s or peddles any of these things on school property. It also includes those who commit criminal assault. The Code holds the parents legally responsible for any property damage or legal expenses caused by the misbehavior of their children.

The government typically means narcotic drugs or dangerous weapons and assault is a criminal assault. But, for example, what actually is a criminal assault? A kick with a steel-toed boot, thus the shoe itself is considered a weapon. Is an aspirin a drug if the recipient has an allergic reaction? Do the schools themselves actually enforce these measures? Again according to Flury the answer is a resounding “No”. The schools themselves do not want the bad publicity. The school boards say they already have perfectly good conduct codes and do not want interference from the local government. The teachers say their principal does not
back them up or the principal is not backed up by the school board and the children quickly figure out that there is no one to stop them (2000). This can then possibly beg the question, “Are the lunatics running the asylum”. [1] It also has to do with who is in charge and what this actually means.

This is in line with the interpretive/constructivist/ecological paradigm where the basic tenet of these theoretical paradigms is that reality is socially constructed and development is a joint function of environmental influences. Mertens references the 1994 Schwandt publication stating that the interpretive/constructivist paradigm, “knowledge is socially constructed by people active in the research process, and that researchers should attempt to understand the “complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it (1998, p.11). This concurs with Bronfenbrenner’s 1992 and 1994 expansion of his ecological paradigm about development within the context of the environment and people that surround a child.

1.4. Impact of the Administration and/or the Team

Although there is a general belief that administrators can either make or break a school the studies, limited as they are, do not really support this conclusion. According to a systematic review commissioned by the Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Coordinating (EPPI) Center at the University of London there isn’t even an agreement on what the terms are for the organizational process. They cite that there are three different terms – administration, management and leadership. Scholars and researchers continue to debate the relationships between these terms. The debate is often between the aims, methods form and style of educational leadership and management. In other words, how and where should leaders focus their attention? Nevertheless, “leadership” is now the most commonly used term, usually interpreted in the following way:

*I take ‘educational leadership’ to have at its core the responsibility for policy formation and where appropriate, organizational transformation; I take ‘educational management’ to refer to an executive function for carrying out agreed policy; finally, I assume that leaders normally also have some management responsibility…”* (Bolam, 1999 p.194).
However, having said this, there is still dissention and confusion. There are some studies that suggest that schools which are efficient and effective have correlations between purposeful leadership by the head teacher(s) and the schools high performance (EPPI 2003). The focus in the United States has been to try to understand the cause and effect of strong leadership on a school environment. Hallinger and Heck (in EPPI 2003) state that ‘not only does the principal have an effect on school outcomes, but more particularly the paths through which such effects are achieved’ (EPPI 2003 p. 7). The following year Hallinger and Heck produced another paper where they proposed, based on their earlier literature reviews, that:

‘First, school leaders achieve effects on their schools indirectly. Skilful school leaders influence school and classroom processes that have a direct effect on student learning. Second, school leaders themselves are subject to considerable influence via the norms and characteristics of the school and its environment’ (Hallinger and Heck, 1999, p. 185).

A strong administration as described by Hallinger and Heck is one that is actively involved with the students, teachers, parents and the community. It means outreach programs like the Parent Teacher Association (PTA), community activities that involve school children such as, “Jumping Rope for your Heart” sponsored by the American Heart and Lung Association for school children to raise funds for research. These are just two examples of how an administration, who involves themselves in the local community, receives support while actively engaging the children and their parents.

It also means getting involved when they have a student in trouble or in a crisis. If the problems are bullying then they design and enforce protocols for handling the situation. If there is a crime committed such as stealing or vandalism then the local authorities are called in. If a child performs poorly in the classroom then there are corrective steps taken that involve the teacher, student and the parents. All of these examples represent the climate a strong, involved administration creates within the school that requires the students, teachers and parents to do their part. If the parents, for example, do not then the school may involve the authorities. The adults in the child’s immediate environment have an enormous impact on how they feel about the environment itself and how they feel about themselves. A positive environment usually produces a positive outlook conversely, a negative environment can have a negative impact.
If the adults feel they are on a functioning team they can relax and know that their opinions will be heard. Antonadis and Videlock state that, “a well functioning team can create a trusting milieu in which individual team members feel safe to express ideas and state professional positions without fear of personal attack” (1991, p.163). When you have an entire team working on the well being of an individual or individuals such as a school then the possibility and probability is that a child, who may be headed for trouble, can be caught in time. Thus the outcome does not necessarily have to be a bad one. This is further supported by Shonkoff’s “Neurons to Neighborhoods” tenth principle, “the course of development can be altered in early childhood by effective intervention that changes the balance of risk and protection, thereby shifting the odds in favor of a more adaptive outcome (2000, p. 23).

When discussing the impact of the administration on a school I went to the EPPI research:

*The overall conclusion of the study was that staff in various schools had similar views of what constitutes good management. The main themes to emerge from this study are most of the main themes of school leadership theory: the importance of ethos, aims, vision and school policy; the head teacher, the senior management team, structure and decision making; professional working relationships; and links with parents and governors (school board).* (2003, p. 23)

A different explanation for why there is so much disagreement over what impact an administration has on identifying problem children is the diagnosis process itself. As stated earlier, diagnoses aren’t codified or even agreed upon in general terms. This lack of a gold standard for diagnosis makes the entire process very subjective and the administration may have an attitude of, “you’re either in or you are out” [4]. This could be a disaster for a child who is just different.

Again it’s all about what is the definition of a conduct disorder or another word for it is misconduct. Conduct disorder as an undiagnosed problem is as controversial as the diagnosis themselves. One explanation for this is that much of the problem is just bad behavior and an utter lack of social skills. A different explanation may have to do with the ambivalence of the administrators and/or school boards to back teachers up in the classroom or the parents to back the administrators. Although it is not necessarily the role of the school to teach manners
it seems that is the place where these skills are going to be learned. This can be as simple as insisting a child say please or thank you or an elaborate plan for an entire social skills program. According to Burns for many children, it seems that basic manners, titles of respect and proper etiquette have become quaint relics of the past (2003).

Nonetheless, the desired outcome is enduring, as this is a transactional process. It’s a matter of the family, child, teacher, school and administrators changing the way they interact. In addition, the child will mature and this could also improve the situation. Within a systems-theoretical perspective, the primary purpose of intervention is to support children (with disabilities) in their development and to promote the quality of life for these children (and their families). When child development is seen as a transactional process, development outcomes are a function of the continuous dynamic interactions of the child with the overall environment, mediated by experiences provided by the family and the child’s immediate environment Björk-Åkesson, Granlund, and Simeonsson,(1995).

2. Aim

How the administration in a school with above average scores on the national tests works to reduce students behavior problems and promote a functional school environment.

2.1. Research Questions

1. How does the administration in a school with above average national test scores work to create a caring, functioning environment within the school?
2. What are the methods and tools used to promote positive contact and understanding?

3. Methods

3.1. Background

We live in Sweden and the Swedish school system is structurally different from the US in a variety of ways. The Skolverket believes in empowerment of the child and a low stress environment thus the mechanics of handling and assessing children are different. For example, grades are given in the US, assessing academic achievement and behavior from the 1st grade whereas grades begin in Sweden in the 8th grade. There are two meetings a year, in general, between the teachers and parents in Sweden whereas report cards are sent home
quarterly in the US. It is much less formal in Sweden between the teachers and students; children address teachers, in the US, by Ms. /Mrs. /Mr. whereas in Sweden they use their first name. The school being researched follows the US system in some respects. A couple of examples are the students receive quarterly performance reviews and they must refer to the teachers by Mr., Ms. or Mrs.

I wanted to look at how a strong relationship between the school in Stockholm that scores above average on the national tests, its students and their families coupled with aggressive communication programs affects the way the students view the school and its functionality, the administration and behavior problems within the school. In addition, I wanted to address the issues of bullying, fighting, and stealing as these are problems that affect schools everywhere and another area that lacks essential guidelines for identification.

3.2. Research Design

The school in Stockholm was chosen because the administration was of English speaking origin and the curriculum is in both English and Swedish. It made the methods for communication easier with much less opportunity for language and cultural confusion.

I selected this school because the guidance counselor was a former master’s candidate at the same university as this researcher. I was given her name and number from the university. She was told this was a thesis on intervention and development and that I was looking for a school to study. The subject I wished to research is how a strong administration with above average test scores on the national exams works to reduce behavior problems and promote a functional school environment was discussed. She was very enthusiastic about the outreach programs the school had to offer and the fact that the student’s reported above average results on the national exams. I asked her if she could arrange a meeting to discuss the case study concept with me. She suggested a meeting with the principal and vice-principal as they all had to agree on that the topic of strong administration, misconduct and the impact on student grades and satisfaction was interesting to them. Subsequently, they all agreed that the topic was interesting to everyone and the interviews were arranged.

All three were interviewed individually about their concepts and ideas about team building, intervention and why this was important to them. I also was equally as interested in how they viewed an enduring, transactional relationship between the school, home and student. They were also asked about what form should the interaction take paying particular
attention to the rules set by the Swedish Skolverket (The National Agency for Education) and, in general, what their thoughts on the subject were.

After the initial interview I found the vice principal to be the person who dealt most with problem behavior. He had informal notes, outlines for speeches and workshops he offered to both teachers and parents on the subject of problem behavior or conduct disorders. They focused on the positive ways to these problematic situations. He’s a pivotal figure on the Student Care Team; he handled most of the communication with the family or authorities if the mentor had not been successful. Additionally, our discussions surrounded documenting his procedures and routines for interventions and to organize a step by step procedure manual for handling troubling behavior.

Both the Handbook for dealing with problem behaviors and the survey (Addendum’s 1 and 2) that was distributed to the 9th grade students asking questions about how they feel about the interventions and the Student Care Team and documenting whether they feel there are changes and if changes are good for them are attached.

This is a case study based on a single school in Stockholm, Sweden. One definition of a case study is “an exploration of a bounded system or a case over time through detailed, in depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context”. (Creswell 1998). There is a criterion for collecting data. It depends on whether it’s single or multiple case studies, as I am using a single case study I quote Yin (in Creswell, 1998 p.63). who recommends six types of information: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observations and physical artifacts. Although I will have little opportunity for direct observations and limited participant observations I will have access to the school’s documentation and interviews with the administration. There is also a survey that’s distributed to the 9th graders. Finally, another focus of this paper is what the administration is doing to cope with and formalize procedures for handling difficult, recurring situations.

3.3. Rationale for the Study

I am studying one school where the students scored above average on the national exams and the administration works with the students and the parents as well as the teachers to constantly improve communication. The school that I am using for this paper has the fundamental philosophy that the environment is a social construction. The core of the
school’s philosophy is empathy, not creating a friendship, per se, but an atmosphere of trust and consistency. This means the door is always open for a child and/or a parent to come in and discuss what is happening with their child and/or at school. The school has been very active over the last couple of years introducing new intervention and communication policies between the school, the child and the family.

In light of the fact that there is ambivalence over what troublesome behavior is and how to accurately describe it, I am paying particular attention to the systems and methods the school uses for assessment, intervention and protocols that are in place for dealing with problem behavior. Although they have a policy for positive reinforcement for the children who do not misbehave, this is about the children who do misbehave and what is done to stop or redirect their energy. I am interested in how the school interacts with the parents and how they are continuously building an environment of trust and mutual assistance between the parents, students and staff while improving scores on the national exams. The study is based on the interviews, notes and a survey I have received from the principal, vice-principal, guidance counselor and the 9th grade students.

3.4. Participants

The school is located in Stockholm, Sweden. It’s a middle school, from grades 6 thru 9. There are 450 students total in the school with approximately 30 students per class. There are 27 full time teachers with the student/teacher ratio of 17:1. There is 5,704 sq. meters of floor space or approximately 17,112 sq.ft. The layout is of a hub and spoke design to maximize visibility and traffic flow.

The principal is American and has taught school in Sweden for approximately 20 years. The vice-principal is British and has taught school approximately the same amount of time in both England and Sweden. The guidance counselor is Swedish and has worked at the school since it began 5 years ago. The curriculum is in both English and Swedish. The 9th grade students were chosen as they have above average results on the national exams and have been at the school the longest and they have the opportunity to comment on the before and after effect of the changes that have occurred as a result of the intervention policies that have been implemented over the last couple of years.

My primary contact is the vice-principal who is very concerned about the effects of bad behavior and the fact that many of the students he sees lack just basic life skills. He has
conducted numerous seminars and workshops with the parent in his community. All three are active participants in the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) which is organized by the school. They communicate with the parents through this organization plus monthly letters, evaluation reports for their child or children and an open door policy from the administration.

The school has instituted a Life Skills Program which bears further study but as this is the first year it is difficult to see how much it is affecting the students and the environment. However the most effective communication link between the students and the parents has been the mentoring program and the Student Care Team which consists of the principal, vice principal, guidance counselor, a teacher representative and the school nurse.

3.5. **Material**

Although I will have little opportunity for direct observations and limited participant observations I will have access to school documents and conduct interviews with the school administration in addition to a student survey. The guidance counselor introduced me to the vice principal and the principal who offered their time and suggestions for how the research would evolve.

The vice principal was the person who was the main contact person. He handled the discipline problems and most of the contact and outreach programs between the school and the parents. He gave me his notes and lectures, forms, student handbook, teacher’s handbook and spent hours discussing the subject of administration and, from his point of view, the positive influence a strong one can have on a school. We designed the survey together to gather information that is germane to the research and to give him information on how the students feel the policies are working. The principal was the person who provided the statistics regarding the school in general and the grades his school had achieved on the national tests. He was the one who sets the tone of the school and created the concept of “magnified individuality”. This is the cornerstone of the programs the school implements to students who are in trouble or could get into trouble. The guidance counselor was the one who put me in touch with the others and provided, within the scope of not violating anyone’s privacy, an overview of the interventions used and who the persons responsible for the tasks of following up. She also discussed the changes in the school and how positive she felt about them and the administration in general.
3.6 Interviews

The questions for the administrators were greatly influenced by a study done by Sheldon and Epstein (2002). They build on studies done by Epstein in 1987, 1995 and 2001 which, in brief, state that students are influenced by the family, school and community contexts in which they develop. Epstein referred to the three as “spheres of influence” which overlap to a greater or lesser degree and that educators play an important role in how these spheres overlap. The study identifies six types of family and community involvement: Type 1, parenting or helping all families establish home environments to support children as students; Type 2, communication or designing effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communication; Type 3, volunteering or recruiting and organizing families to help the school and support students; Type 4, learning at home or providing families with information and ideas to help students with homework; Type 5, decision making or including parents in school decisions and developing parent leaders; and Type 6, collaboration with the community or identifying and integrating resources and service from the community to strengthen schools, students and families (Sheldon and Epstein 2002).

Based on these guidelines, for this paper this researcher took these six types, to greater or lesser degrees, and designed her own open-ended questions as this reflected similar concepts of a strong involvement between the schools, family which ultimately impacts the student.

In this paper, the content of the questions stayed the same but the follow up questions changed according to the flow of the conversation. However, each of the administrators was asked the same questions in the same order. The questions focused on the administration’s policies and their attempt to codify procedures for communication between the school, home, teachers and the students when handling problematic situations in the school. They were also asked about communication between themselves and how they felt about their contribution to a team environment. However, a few areas were targeted, such as bullying, stealing and fighting.

During the second interview with the principal the questions were more specific but also included the theme of strong administration, impact of the administration on the environment, communication etc. The specific topics included school size and area, student population and what approach to teaching does the school employ, e.g. traditional, progressive etc. national
exam results were also discussed. This led to a further discussion on the cause and effect of strong ties between the school, student and family.

The observations of the students and the tone of the school were made when visiting the school six times, walking around with the vice-principal and watching the interaction between him and the students as well as watching the students move between classes, talking to each other and interacting with teachers. It was orderly and the noise level was moderate; the students treated the teachers with deference and respect.

The interviews took place at the Engelska Skolan in Stockholm, Sweden. There was one interview with the guidance counselor, two interviews with the principal and six interviews with the vice-principal plus numerous phone conversations and emails seeking additional information or clarification. The results of the interviews were paraphrased in a notebook during the interviews including the impressions left over after the interviews were finished. Phone calls were made or emails sent to clarify points that were not clear or ask additional questions. The notes on the interviews were read over and over again until there were a few topics that emerged dominant. The words strong and caring were the dominant themes although they were used in several different contexts.

### 3.5 The Survey

(See Addendum 2).

There were 8 questions including a space for comments. The comments, (5 out of the 16 surveys) had to do with the belief that school is boring and thus had little relevancy to the before and after situation.

There were 90 surveys in total handed out. They were sorted by the number of years they had been at the school. It was decided to only use the surveys of students who had been at the school 3 or more years. 42 were returned and out of the 42, 1 was disqualified because the student had only been at the school for 2 years and 15 others were disqualified because only half of the survey was given to them. There were 26 total surveys in total used, which represents 29% of the 9th graders.
The questions were based on areas of interest to the vice-principal about the impression, by the students, of the Student Care Team and the interventions that have been implemented over the last two years. The requirement was that you have been at the school three or four years. The reason for this is that these students would have seen the before and after effect of both the changes that had been implemented plus the response to the Student Care Team.

3.6 Data Analysis

This study is based on observations, personal notes, interviews and a survey/test results from the 9th graders. The primary source of information about the school was from the vice principal and he offered me his notes, examples of the tools and instruments they used to communicate with both the students and the parents. I reviewed the student handbook but was told this is confidential and could not be reproduced. I read the handbook to gleam the direction of the administration and the seriousness of their commitment to the school. This researcher took notes and paraphrased the conversations and telephone discussions in a notebook. When questions about the clarity of a point arose the researcher primarily contacted the vice principal for clarification or to invite a different path in the research on the school. This researcher read and re read the notes over and over again until two main themes emerged, the concepts of strength and caring. The survey information was converted to a percentage scale. The national test results of the school were compared with the results for the entire country for 2005.

3.6.1 Accuracy of research methods

In this section, we will discuss the view I used to check the accuracy of the data and how I went about achieving this throughout my study.

Researchers hold opposing views on the relevance of reliability and validity in checking the accuracy of qualitative research. Some researchers suggest that these terms are more suited to quantitative research whereas in qualitative research it is necessary to specify terms and ways of establishing and assessing the quality of qualitative research and it is therefore prudent to use either trustworthiness or authenticity. To achieve this Bryman recommends that trustworthiness be used and divides it into four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Bryman, 2004). Varying philosophical and theoretical
orientations to qualitative inquiry remind us that issues of quality and credibility intersect with audience and intended research purposes.

Credibility:

The credibility of my study is obtained by using Persistent Observation; I had 5 visits and between 25 - 30 phone calls and emails and as my primary tool, Member Checks. I was constantly checking with the source of my information, primarily the vice principal, about what I was writing via drafts of the report, email and telephone conversations. This enabled me to accurately write down what he was telling me about the school and the programs being instituted. The others that were interviewed were also given the opportunity to review via drafts what I had written.

Transferability:

Transferability implies that the findings of a study can be transferred to other similar situations. However according to Mertens the burden of transferability is on the reader to determine the degree of similarity between the study site and the receiving context. The researcher’s responsibility is to provide sufficient detail to enable the reader to make such a judgment (Mertens 1997). This poses problems in qualitative studies since the findings often cannot be generalized. The fact is this is a school in Stockholm Sweden it may limit to some degree the transferability as the Swedish educational structure may be fundamentally different then others. But, what is transferable is the involvement of the administration in programs such as the PTA, assertive communication policies such as sending home quarterly reports, peer evaluations of the teacher and administrations performance. They have rules for behavior and protocols for intervention if there are repeat violations of these standards’. Finally, there are Letters of Understanding between the administration and the family and the administration and the faculty.

Dependability and Confirmability:

Guba and Lincoln (in Mertens 1997) identified dependability as the qualitative parallel to reliability. Dependability entails ensuring that complete records of the research process are kept of all phases of the research process, peers then act as auditors during the course of the research to establish how far proper procedures are being and have been followed (Bryman, 2004). In this study, the person I was interviewing acted as my peer review group as I had no
peers to review my work. My supervisors also reviewed the initial transcripts of notes and we all agreed a summation was preferable. They read and revised independently and together each draft and answered questions as they saw fit. I kept my notebook, information given to me by the school and the vice principal organized and chronological, including documenting the changes that were being made along the way.

3 Results

To answer the research questions the literature was aggregated with the observations, notes, interview and survey information. Two dominant themes were identified in the analysis of the collected data; they were “strong” and “caring”. Below are the interpretations by this researcher on what the different meanings for these two dominant themes are:

The word “strong” is interpreted for this study by the behavior and attitudes of the administration. These include:

- Keeping a respectful distance between themselves and the students.
- Spending the time and energy keeping in touch with the families and keeping them informed of their child’s school situation.
- Monitoring the teachers and the classrooms insuring they are functioning the way they should
- Establishing rules and protocols that are clearly defined, written down and kept in an easily accessed, designated place.
- Develop protocols insuring the teachers and students are responsible and accountable for their behavior and actions.

The recurring philosophy surrounding the word “strong” appeared over and over in the interviews, the theme includes:

- Strong administration led to strong team atmosphere which led to satisfaction on the part of the faculty and students.
- Clear communication between the school, student and family was an essential ingredient to the success of the students and the school.
- The student was the top priority. Their education, safety and well being.
• Responsibility, responsibility, responsibility for oneself on the part of the students, parents, teachers and administrators.

The word “caring” is defined by the tools that the administration uses to communicate with the teachers, students and parents.

• There is a student and staff handbook that is given to each family/faculty member before the student/faculty member begins at the school outlining the duties and responsibilities of the student/teacher.
• Follow up protocols are outlined in the handbook if there is a problem.
• A Letter of Understanding signed by the parents and students outlining what behaviors and responsibilities are expected by the children and the parents.
• Monthly update reports sent home to parents to keep them abreast of the upcoming events.
• Quarterly progress reports given to the student and the parents keeping each family updated on the child’s progress.
• Having written rules and intervention protocols in place, signed by both the child parent and the teacher from the moment the student enters the school.

This is the gateway for open communication if there are problems or even if there are not. The rules are clear, communication is free flowing and the excuse of “I didn’t know” is minimized.

There are protocols in place for students if problems develop, they are:

• Counseling
• Daily Self Evaluation Report or a Student Behavior Survey (SBS)
• Individualized Service Plan (ISP)
• Collaboration between the family, school and the authorities, if need be, for additional support for the student.
• Develop and continuously update/change/reflect upon a quick reference guide with established protocols for handling bullying, stealing, conflict and vandalism.

This team philosophy is the basis of the intervention process at the International School. The core belief, which is the basis of the school culture is, “Magnified Individuality”. This
means the needs of the individual are magnified. However, the administration also places the emphasis on one must, “walk softly but carry a big stick” [3]. They are not here to be a buddy but to help and guide the students.

The approach to teaching is on one hand traditional. This includes giving quizzes, tests and evaluation reports to the students and the parents. The students are assigned projects that are worked on individually or in-groups with deadlines that must be met. The school has classrooms with desks and depending on the subject they are situated in either rows or groups of desks. For example, in a math class the rows are vertical; in science they are horizontal due to the set up of the lab. Conversely, in art or liberal arts classes the desks are arranged often in groups for the purpose of sharing ideas, working together or sharing resources.

On the other hand, the approach to education can also be considered progressive because they use a more transactional approach to the students than a traditional, formal classroom. Students are invited and encouraged to express themselves constructively but freely. Children are not grouped as a single entity but as individuals. The administration believes they spend the preponderance of their time (approximately 80%) on the children who need the most attention for either behavior problems or maybe they have problems with keeping up with the rest of the class. The ones who do not necessarily need their undivided attention are encouraged to continue in there behavior by frequent “atta boy’s” and other forms of verbal reinforcement.

The following is their approach to character development of the individual child. To achieve this goal:

- Every child and family signs a letter of Understanding for the Rules and Procedures for the school. This includes no electronic equipment on during school hours (limited concessions for mobile phones). No caps/hats in school, no gum chewing and all adults are addressed by their surname with a Ms. Mr. or Mrs. attached.
- There are 2 mentors for each classroom. This means there are about 15 kids per mentor. The mentors are also the teachers in the school. They are the first point of contact with the parents if the child is having trouble.
- There is an active Parent Teacher Association (PTA) that teachers rotate to attend meetings after school hours. This is voluntary so they are not compensated.
Detention is given as well as supervised special class work. The teachers supervise detention. The Vice-Principal supervises special classes. Teachers are asked to periodically and voluntarily patrol the hallways during lunch hours and break times to maintain a calm environment.

Teachers are required to submit self evaluation as well as being evaluated.

The administration is assessed by the teaching staff.

When a child gets into trouble the school contacts the parents immediately. The philosophy is to build a team with the parents involved. They believe that the school, child and family are essential in order to make an intervention work. They also believe that you cannot threaten to do something with a child and then fail to follow through. They believe in praising a child when they have had a positive change of behavior and the praise must be immediate. They believe that assigning “blame” is counter-productive. It only fosters ill will and mistrust.

They also use a form of the Student Behavior Survey (SBS) by asking the child to assess themselves, have the teacher either agree and sign it or disagree and state the reasons why. They will also ask the parents, if the behavior is past the point of ordinary measures, to offer their view of the situation, why it’s happening and what they feel should be done. If the child needs more help then the school is able to offer then they all work together with the authorities to get the child the help he/she needs.

They also stressed the fact that there are specific goals for teachers too. These responsibilities and goals are outlined in the Teachers Handbook. The Handbook is given to each teacher along with a signed letter stating the handbook has been read. If a teacher does not fulfill his or her responsibility there are controls in place for following up. For example, goals are set for each year; a teacher must submit a syllabus and a quarterly follow up in writing stating the class is adhering to the schedule. If not, then it is ascertained by the principal or vice principal what the problem is and corrective action taken.

They spend a lot of time letting the parents speak first and then trying to sort out with them what the problem with their child is. They have their faculty and staff intimately involved in the decisions surrounding a student who is in trouble or has the potential for getting into trouble. If things do not seem to be stabilizing then the next step is an Individualized Service Plan which includes the SBS, input from both the Student Care Team
and the parents. An effective ISP must take into account the environment including cultural issues, traditions, community norms, school philosophy and the family structure including the relationships. An ISP can’t be successful if all the parties do not “buy into the how’s and why’s of the intervention.

Below is Table: 1 and the bar chart comparing the Swedish National Average to the results of the Engelska Skolan. The Engelska Skolan ranks highest in their school district, according to the principal. He gave me the number of students from his school who received A’s, B’s etc. as reported to him by the Skolverket. The results for the other municipality schools unfortunately, were not reported by the numbers of A’s B’s etc. by the Skolverket. The scores for the individual scores, (A’s B’s…) for the municipality, was grouped together with special needs and English for Swedes and Swedish for immigrants so the municipal numbers could not be used to compare with the National Average and the Engleska Skolan. However the national averages were reported. See Charts below.

The vice-principals notes coupled with numerous follow up conversations produced a Quick Reference Guide for handling situations surrounding bullying, stealing, fighting and vandalism. (Addendum 1).
### 3.6 Table 1: Grades Comparison 2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Grades by %</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nat’l Avg.</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>40.9</td>
<td>44.8</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>Engelska skolan Avg</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>38.9</td>
<td>42.2</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nat’l Avg.</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>43.4</td>
<td>36.6</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>Engelska skolan Avg</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nat’l Avg.</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>54.9</td>
<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>Engelska skolan Avg</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>41.1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Subject: Swedish](image)

![Subject: English](image)

![Subject: Math](image)
3.7 Table 2: Summary of Survey from the School in Stockholm, Sweden

The results of the survey were (in percentages of surveys used):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feel safe at school</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel cared for by the administration and</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Care Team</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration and Student Care Team</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>handles problems well</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive response to a reported incident</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incidents of bullying, stealing… have</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stayed the same</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incidents of bullying, stealing… have</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gone down</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4 Discussion and Conclusions

This is a case study of one school that had a strong, committed administration and the test scores are above the national average. One of the choices this researcher made is to summarize the interviews and conversations of this single case study. This was done because the researcher felt that this did not require the exactness of a taped conversation because the study itself did not require exactness in of itself. There would have to be many schools studied or surveyed to really know if this is a conclusive correlation. It is my belief they are connected based on my own experience in schools as a student and a parent; but that is my experience, it is a bias and also one of the weaknesses’ in this study. Having said that however, this premise is backed up by the literature I found on this matter of a strong administration and better behavior on the part of the students and an improvement in
performance but there is very little concrete evidence to back this up. As Bryman stated, one of the main criticisms of qualitative research is that its findings cannot be generalized; that is few cases cannot be representative of all cases and that it is difficult to replicate since there is hardly any standard procedure to follow (Bryman 2004). This is one of the major weaknesses of this study; being able to duplicate it as there are very few procedures for assessing administrators or for that matter children. Conversely, one of the strengths of this is I was able to compare test scores and those comparisons are easy to transfer in Sweden. Again, it falls apart once you leave the Swedish border but standardized tests in reading and math assuming similar goals set for each grade can at least be discussed.

Transparency is often found to be lacking in many qualitative studies. This occurs when it is unclear how the people were chosen for investigation and how the researchers arrived at the conclusions. I discussed the primary point of contact was the guidance counselor and subsequently connected with the vice principal and the principal. Another strength is I give a summated account of how and who the information was gotten from the school. It keeps the accounts brief and easier to read. If someone actually wants to check they may, but this is interviews with primarily the vice principal and he oversaw the development of the study.

Another weakness is the researcher’s bias that a strong administration does create an atmosphere of learning and respect. This is based on her own experiences as a student and a parent. This is a discussion of attitudes and beliefs. The attitude is positive and the belief is if you work together their will probably be a positive outcome. That’s the basic premise of this “repertoire of beliefs”. Below is what was excised from my discussions with this particular school.

After interviewing the principal, vice principal, the guidance counselor and reviewing the survey given to the 9th graders, it appears, the theme of “Magnified Individuality” has entrenched itself in the school. The vice-principal and the counselor described the same feeling and perception of very much being on and part of a team. They both said that their voices were heard they worked independently without a lot of interference because they believed they were trusted.

The principal expressed the perception of not only leading the team but also being on the team. They all felt supported by the families of the children and that they had to work very hard on the relationship between themselves and the students. Each of them expressed
satisfaction with their work environment and believed some of the new programs that were introduced such as the Life Skills Program, were going to make the school environment even better for themselves and the students. This is in line with the literature on building a strong team and the team’s ability to speak and do their jobs means a lot is accomplished as the fear factor of office politics has been minimized.

When looking at this school in relation to Bronfenbrenner’s model the only divergence I make is in the macro system. This is about the “societal blueprint for particular cultures, subcultures or other broader social context”. (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). In the case of this school, they use each system paying close attention to the meso while embedding the micro and macro systems of the child. This includes the people and their actions, the environment and social systems that are surrounding and influencing him/her. This means, in this particular case, what the parents, teachers and administrators are doing together to make the child’s world more connected between home and school. The administration believes that the system of beliefs within the family and the societal blueprint are both important and must be considered before contact is made. The administration strives towards the goal of the children believing the parents and school are working together for them. The school also moves out to the exo systems where they, if seeing a child in trouble will contact the parents immediately and determine between the school and the home what the best course of action is to help the child. If the parent is unable or unwilling due to, for example, ill health, personal problem etc.; and then the school will contact the authorities to assist the child in question. The child, which is the focus of the discussions, is not necessarily a part of the final decision making process.

To illustrate this point, one of the strategies for helping a child and making them more responsible for themselves is doing a daily self evaluation, mentioned earlier, as a first step in an ISP to assist he child in seeing how he/she sees the behavior and what the point of view of the teacher is. This means for a predetermined period of time set by the school, they have to assess their performance each day as to how they behaved in each class and did they do the work assigned both in and out of the classroom. The teacher must sign it and say they have made a reasonable evaluation of their performance or the teacher does not agree and states why. This is then given to the Student Care Team and in conjunction with the parents, decides what the next step will be. If all goes well and the child appears to “get it” then they stop the self evaluation and the child goes back to regular routines. If things do not go well
and the child continues with the disruptive/destructive behavior then the parents, authorities, if needed, and school will determine what the next step(s) will be.

The importance of this lies in the fact that this school is located in a neighborhood with immigrants from many different countries. The societal and hierarchical systems of the families are a priority when talking to them about their children. Although many of the students are Swedish, a large number the students come from immigrant families who have come from oppressed or war torn countries. Other families come from cultures where there are different expectations and standards of behavior for boys and girls, “It must be kept in mind that cultural norms vary considerably in the sharing of sensitive information and expression of feeling”, (Walsh 2002 p. 413). These and other factors must be considered when approaching a family with a problem. The family may or may not have had a good experience with the local authorities in Sweden and/or the authorities in their home country. According to the administration, often the family can view the school in the same category as the authorities therefore they may be suspicious as they may have a deep seeded fear or mistrust of authority figures. Sometimes the administration must be patient because the parents themselves are afraid to come to school, believing something terrible could happen to their children or themselves based on their experiences in their home country. This is something the school is very sensitive to and many times reassure a parent that it’s ok to come or they must allow a parent to vent their frustration for some minutes before they can talk about the problem of the child.

Ultimately, each intervention is tailor made to suit the child. There are standard procedures such as the SBS and telephoning the parents but if the administration feels that the child may for example, just need someone to talk to or the child needs more food then they incorporate this in the process. Because there are no gold standards or procedures for identifying misbehavior or a description of how this behavior manifests itself, they have created their own guidelines and strategies for identifying and intervening when they see “bad” behavior.

Categorically, the students and the administrators described the feeling of being on or part of a team. The students described the administration as generally supportive and they felt good about them and the school as a whole. The administrator’s felt they were doing a pretty good job of keeping the students, parents and teachers on the same team. This was further exemplified by the fact that on the national test scores this school ranked number one in their
municipality and above average compared to the rest of Sweden. The real question is their a correlation? That is unanswerable in this study it would need many schools and the same approach to each school with the same, as much is possible, of the results and the changes that occur as a result of a fluid research situation. There are also inconclusive results in the literature. Most administrators, in the literature I read “think” there is a correlation but can not quantify it, so the quest goes forward in the research of administrators impact on students and their academic performance.

Unfortunately most of the literature that is available in English comes from the United States although both England and Australia have a fair amount of information out there, which is a weakness in this study. The American conditions are guidelines and it’s a good place to start. The school is in Sweden and must adhere to Swedish rules and regulations. However, I think the Swedish condition is becoming similar to the American condition in so far as Sweden is becoming more integrated with each passing year. The US has been facing problems of mass integration for the last 30 years. The US system has had to accommodate and change to meet the changing needs of the population. The Swedish system is facing a similar situation with the changing needs of the new students and parents that entered Sweden and the Swedish school system. Therefore, I believe there are more similarities then dissimilarities, so ultimately it may wind up being a strength.

I think the methods, which were very close to the American/British conditions, the vice principal used could be transferred to any school, anywhere. The difference would lie in whether the administrators from another school(s) would be willing to commit their time and the resources to implementing and following through with these types of programs. That is the difference in essence of a strong, above average administration and an average to below average administration.

Although it is still an open discussion about how an administration impacts a school and how different interventions work. This school uses interventions similar to those discussed in the current literature; and in this one case the strategies and interventions appear to impact the students in a positive way when supported by a strong administration and cooperation between the school and the family. The administration has stated how satisfied they are with their work environment and the team concept approach that is taken. The 9th graders have expressed satisfaction with the overall school environment and their test scores are above the national average. It appears that the formalities that are an intricate part of the school
philosophy have created an atmosphere of respect and developed appropriate boundaries between the staff, students and their families.

The validity and reliability issues are very difficult in a single case study and are also one of the intrinsic weaknesses to a single case study. The reliability comes from one source and the validity of the information is inherent in the fact this is a single case study and one assumes the people one is studying are honest and forthright in their answers and information. The validity issue is whether it matches up to the findings in other research. Considering the fact there is nothing really conclusive in the research, this school matched the supposition that if you have a strong caring administration then you may have a positive outcome. Is this conclusive? The answer is no, but it’s interesting and bears further study.

Finally, although, the administration of this particular school has attempted to codify conduct disorders and how they respond to them, the subject of exactly what conduct disorder is still remains a topic of continued discussion. Even with a strong, caring administration, without clearer guidelines from the two major diagnostic manuals, DSM-IV and the ICD-10 the diagnosing and interventions for children who do not fall into existing diagnostic categories, is a slippery slope.
Addendum 1

A Handbook of Step by Step Instructions for Dealing with Bullying, Conflict, Theft and Vandalism

This begins with an overview of what the responsibilities are for the staff to keep informed of events. The next step is a step by step intervention process used by this school. Again as mentioned earlier the basis of this is empathy not bonding, fairness not equality. It keeps a quantifiable separation between the students and the teachers.

The place to begin is with the communication between the parents and the school because it is for their child at school and they need to know what is going on. To support and expand on this philosophy there have to be protocols and procedures in place for communication between the school and the parents. However, one must be cautious because, “It must be kept in mind that cultural norms vary considerably in the sharing of sensitive information and expression of feeling” (Walsh 2002, p. 413). Sharing information about someone child especially if there is a problem is really delicate and must be handled in a clear, professional and systematic manner.

To begin with there is a Staff Handbook. This is published and updated each year, if necessary. This outlines in great detail the duties, responsibilities and expectations the administration has for the staff. It details process and procedures for handling problematic or worrisome situations. It outlines explicitly the working hours and expectations for these hours. It also includes the voluntary responsibilities that are expected from each teacher as an employee and active, contributing member of the school. These responsibilities include:

- Monitoring hallways and the cafeteria.
- Attending Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings
- Being a mentor to the students of their classroom or another class.
- Weekly teacher updates are distributed with reminders and instructions of the things that need to be done in the classroom and for the administration.
- Self-evaluation forms are given out for the teachers to assess their performance.
- Evaluation forms are also given for the staff to critique the administration and offer feedback on how things can be improved.
Methods and Procedures for Handling a Worrisome Situation

If a situation arises:

- Speak to the student about the incident and remind them of the classroom rules.
- Fill out an Incident Report (See Addendum’s).
- Contact appropriate persons and inform them about what is going on.
- Monitor the situation
- Follow up and make sure if there is improvement praise is given immediately and often.

Methods for Handling the General Problems

- The scheduling of lessons is staggered to reduce congestion in the hallways during lesson change.
- One schedule for the entire year for each class. This avoids confusion and an excuse for not being where they are supposed to be.
- Different starting times for all the classes.
- Rules for the classroom are on a poster and posted in the front of each classroom.
- Classroom rules are repeated daily for the first few weeks of the school year.
- If grades are not normally given then a quarterly progress report is given to the parents for the years 6, 7. Grades for 8 & 9 are given at the end of the year.
- Teachers monitor lunchroom and hallways during lunch and lesson change.
- Teachers eat in the lunchroom but normally do not socialize with the students.
- There is monthly Parent Teacher Association (PTA) a meeting that teachers must rotate attendance and an announcement is sent to each family in the school.
- A “Staff Handbook” issued to each teacher outlining duties, responsibilities and policy networks. This includes voluntary duties that are an integral part of their job. The handbook is proprietary.

Methods and Procedures for Handling Specific Problems

Bullying

Bullying is a very big problem in schools everywhere. At times school appears to be Darwinian in nature. If you look pretty much the same and you act pretty much the same as
the group you have attached yourself to then life can be bearable to good. But, if you dare to be different or simply are different then life at a school can be difficult and at times unbearable. Darwin said that the organism that best “fits” its environment had the best chance of survival; The plant or animal best “fitted” to its natural environment, according to Darwin, would be the most likely to survive and thrive. Hence, the term “survival of the fittest.” [2].

The first place to start is to attempt to define and recognize bullying. The next section is the discussion portion to be taken with the students either by their homeroom teacher/mentor or through the guidance counselor or whomever the designated adult is to lead these conversations.

**Points of Discussion and Strategies:**

- What is bullying?
- How do we recognize when someone is being bullied or is bullying?
- How does one feel or what does one do when they witness someone being bullied?

These are the definitions and explanations that the discussion leader gives to the students regarding bullying and what it looks like and what it means. This is after the discussion portion to help focus and define the broader discussion points.

Bullying can be:

Physical – pushing, hitting, and throwing things, tripping or knocking someone down. It can also be making faces, making jokes about a person, mimicking their movement or how and what they say, making rude or obscene gestures.

Verbal - this includes name-calling, insulting someone(s) to their face, in front of their friends, in front of the class anyplace that’s public

Indirect - A person is left out of activities like party’s or having to sit alone at lunch. It can also be chosen last for a team in gym class or everyone complaining that the individual(s) is on their team. No one wants to sit next to him or her or complains/refuses to work with him or her. The spreading of malicious rumors and/or discouraging others from being friends with an individual(s).
One or more individuals can do all of these varying types of bullying.

According to Jay Elder there are general types of bullying but maybe a more precise definition is,” repeated, hurtful/harmful acts against an individual or individuals over a period of time”.

**Strategies for Discussions with Students about Bullying**

The very first step is telling the person who is being bullied that “this will stop”.

When a child is being bullied there should be a set protocol for dealing with the situation. These protocols include trying to figure out who is actually responsible. Unwittingly or sometimes just for attention the child can contribute or even create a situation where they are bullied. This does not make it right but it is imperative to understand from the beginning who is involved and what is their contribution to the situation.

- Begin with the statement to the child being bullied “this will stop”.
- The next step is,” everything will be ok, maybe not today but we will solve this”.
- Praise the child for coming forward. They should not have to suffer in silence…
- Let them know that you are here to help.
- Get to know the student(s) focusing on the positive aspects about them and their lives. Talk about what they’re good at, proud of, whom are their friends, things that they like, what makes them laugh…
- Ask them why they think this is happening to them.
- Mean what you say. Under no circumstance do you promise to do something and then not do it. Make sure you understand your boundaries as a teacher/administrator before you begin.

When dealing with a bully/ies it is important to avoid discussions that include statements from the child such as, “we’re friends, we just do this to each other” or “I/we are just kidding we really like this person”, “Look s/he really doesn’t care, they’re smiling/laughing”. This is just a distraction for the problem, which is a person is being mistreated. The proper response to these claims could be, “yes, we can discuss whether you really understand how your friend feels but the fact is we are talking about bullying not the relationship you have with your friend”.

4
Ask the bully(ies) specific, relevant questions to the situation and the person:

- How do you think the person feels?
- Would you like to be treated this way?
- Would you like to be slammed into a locker or knocked down or be tripped and look silly trying to avoid falling?
- Are you afraid to change classes at the bell for fear of being taunted or assaulted?
- Do you have the right to deliberately make someone else unhappy’’?

A fourth strategy is to allow the “bully/ies” to give their side of the story. Find out why they are doing it. Is it:

- To impress friends?
- Avoid being bullied?
- Trying to be accepted by a certain click?
- Do they feel bad themselves?
- Are they having trouble at home?
- Is this a coping strategy?
- How do they feel about school/friends in general?

A fifth strategy is to involve the class and discuss bullying and how they perceive it.

- How they feel when they see it. Share some of their experiences.
- Ask them to contribute phrases that they attach to bullying such as, lonely, ashamed, embarrassed, helpless, ugly, weak, and hunted. There are so many adjectives to draw from to describe these feelings.
- Labeling - it often makes it more real, more understandable to them. It puts a name on the emotion.

A sixth strategy is to have the children create posters themselves about bullying. Use the terms that were presented and talked about in the classroom about bullying when creating posters to put up around the school creating an interactive awareness of this problem.

The final step when dealing with the bully is to explain the consequences for their actions and what steps can/will be taken.
- Tell them that the faculty and administration knows. In other words, “we’re watching you”!
- Offer those help and guidance.
- Give them small steps to take to change their behavior such as, take 3 deep breaths, think of the consequences
- Remind them about the school rules regarding bullying and the steps that will be taken such as a warning, calling their parents, perhaps a day apart from the other students in a supervised environment and if it continues contacting the authorities.
- As there is generally one or more individual’s in charge or the “ringleaders”. Remind all the participants even if they aren’t doing the actual deed that they too will be held accountable for their contribution.
- ‘Bullying is a violation of local laws thus a report can be filed with the authorities.
- Mean what you say. Do not under any circumstances threaten an action and then fail to follow through. This will reduce your credibility as the adult/professional. The bullying will get worse because the bully/ies now know you probably can’t or won’t do anything about the behavior.

**Address the Victims Feelings of:**

- Shame/confusion/fear/helplessness
- Low self esteem
- Don’t know why or what to do
- This is a vicious cycle
- Do not know the outcome of the meetings, will others find out? Will you tell my parents? It is extremely important the child knows and can count on confidentiality and/or selective confidentiality.
- One must be consistent all the time. There is no room for insecurity. Meaning they need to know and be informed as to what is going on all the time and they are a part of the decision making process.
- Try to understand the feelings of unhappiness and loneliness even if it turns out that they are a contributing factor to the situation.
- Do what you say you’re going to do. There can be no empty promises.
Objectives for this Strategy:

- Providing care and comfort and a feeling of having someone to turn to.
- Providing coping and avoidance strategies
- Working with the “bully/ies” to get it to stop and understand what they are doing and find out why they are doing it.
- Putting up posters designed by the students create a better awareness of the problem. It also encourages student to come forward because they know that the school wants to help them and will help them.
- Remind the person/persons who are being bullied and the bully/ies that it is:
  1. Against school policy
  2. Against the law
  3. No one has the right to deliberately make another unhappy or scared
- Equip the student with strategies to avoid a situation.
- How to handle a situation where they’re being bullied. Do not satisfy the bully or contribute or encourage escalation,

Goals for this Strategy:

Opening a line of communication and making the rest of the student body aware of the implications to an individual(s) who is/are being bullied.

The Strategy:

- Find out who is involved, when the event happened (names are not always necessary.
- Try to ascertain who knows, who is watching and what the spectators(s) do, if anything.
- Do not become frustrated or angry with the child even if it becomes apparent that they are contributing.
- Explain the bully/ies intent (if known) and how they gain satisfaction.
- When discussing what payoff the bully is looking for remind the individual that the bully really does not know them and that everyone is different and this too is ok. All of us have something that we can be teased about. This helps reduce the “shame” element.
- Use role-playing to recreate the incident and then “practice” or “act out” what the response(s) they would like to have could be.
- Work in groups. Get other student involved in the “acting” and the responses to gain insight, familiarity and demystify the situation.
- Try to find ways to avoid the situation by engaging in other activities, finding different friends. This also requires reviewing the behavior of the bullied individual(s) and ascertain how, if at all, they are contributing to the problem and addressing this behavior in an open and honest forum.
- Work on the self-esteem of all parties involved.
- Never refer to your own experiences. The purpose is not to bond. The purpose is to express sympathy and emphasize that bullying and being bullied is wrong. It is critical that the individual views the adult as an adult and not as a peer. This will reduce the credibility of the adult.

Follow up Strategies:

- There are mentors for each child. This is a teacher or a faculty member.
- If one sees someone being bullied or is being bullied report it to the mentor.
- Do not join in when someone is being bullied.
- Do not encourage the bully/ies by laughing or standing there watching.
- Show the bully/ies you are not impressed.
- Talk to the individual(s), tell that you think bullying is wrong.
- Show concern for the “victim”.
- Do not ignore what you see and hear.

The Poster:

This should be created by the students, for the students. This means engaging all the students and having several groups from each classroom, under the supervision of the teacher, make these posters. It should reflect the words and feelings of the children. It should, within reason, be written in their language to make it understandable to the other children. They should be hung up in the classrooms and in hallways and the cafeteria.
The posters should, if possible, be laminated to prevent vandalism. If a poster is vandalized either clean it off or take the poster down. Do not leave it up for the students to see day after day. It supports the impression that the faculty and staff really do not care.

In each classroom there should be a discussion and decision made regarding how bullying should be handled. What are the rules and procedures for classrooms that include handling a situation when one sees someone bullied or bullying. For example, report what you see to the teacher, do not encourage the bully/ies etc. This should be written down on another poster and should go on the wall beside the poster on bullying.

The school policy should be written down and situated next to each poster in the classrooms. This is not necessarily practical in the hallways/cafeteria.

Bullying is a problem that affects schools worldwide; each school however handles it differently. This is an attempt to create a set procedure for handling bullying wherever it may occur.

**Theft/Vandalism/Fighting**

If there is a theft, again there is a set protocol for apprehending the thief and solving the crime.

**Strategy**

- The first step is ascertaining who either is the thief/vandal(s)/fighters are and who was there and witnessed the theft/vandalism/fight.
- Separate all these children immediately from the rest of the student body and each other. This includes the suspected thief/vandal(s) and the possible witnesses.
- Always have a pen and a piece of paper in front of you. This implies that this is serious and that it will not be forgotten.
- Actually write down what they say on the paper in front of you.
- Show it to them make sure they understand what has been written.
If you are very sure you have the culprit(s):

- Do not ask, “did you do it”? This leaves the option of the thief/vandal(s) to say, “no”. Once a student has said no or lied it becomes much more difficult for them to say yes and the intended outcome is truth, consequences and help.
- Questioning should focus more upon why, where and the reason for the action. A positive outcome and a trust in forgiveness should support this.
- If they are really entrenched in their story it may be a time for a tactic that will really scare a child. The point to this is for the child to remember what it felt like to believe this tactic was going to be taken, that the consequences were too much compared to the “crime” that had been committed. This can turn a child’s head in the right direction.

However, if you have built a solid case and you are sure the person(s) are guilty then you can ask more direct questions.

- “Why did you do it”? What did you think you would gain by this action? Prestige? Laughs? Trying to fit in? How are you and your family going to pay for this?
- Are you aware vandalism/stealing are against school rules and the law?
- What is the best way for us (school and the child) to handle this meaning that the student is empowered and is able to focus upon a solution rather then focusing on avoiding the consequences for their dishonesty/actions?

For fighting:

- Why did you hit him/her? Did you slug him/her in the face?
- What did you think you will gain by this action? Prestige? Laughs? Trying to fit in?
- Are you aware hitting someone is against school rules and the law?

The strategy for the most part is similar but the questions are different they follow a specific order which is

1. Their actions
2. The other student actions
3. Background
The intent is for some period of time during the conversation is to isolate their actions and reflect upon their actions rather than allowing them to justify their actions based on another child’s actions. After this you can discuss what they may have been able to do differently and establish their role as an individual in the incident. If the focus is strictly upon the person they’ve had a fight with then they are justifying their violent conduct rather than assessing their own actions. Focusing upon a reason or an excuse can lead to using reason to justify and therefore manipulating what has actually happened. The idea is if they create a smokescreen and you allow them to do so then they will avoid honesty and understanding and consequences and learning.

An example is that students are aware that if they can say a nasty thing on a chat line and no one can prove it was them because of the assumed names they take. Or they hear about something that was said about them then they can say that this other person said…. *The child knows you can not interview all the people who said that she said that he said…

If a child is allowed to proceed with this line of defense then the end will never come. This will be a circular conversation.

These different behavior management techniques will vary according to whether it’s a group, individual or a class. Behavior is influenced by what is going on either in school because they are very behind in their schoolwork and feel ashamed so therefore can cause trouble. If they are having problems at home this can cause problems. Frustration at either one or both or other things Behavior problems have to do with lack of self-image, attention seeking, rebellious, family, role models, peer group, life experiences. Sometimes one must dig a little deeper.
Addendum 2

Questions for the Principal, Vice-Principal and the Guidance Counselor (first interview)

1. Tell me a bit about your professional background?
2. What is your general view of interacting with children? Meaning, do you use an authoritative stance? Gentle? Friendly? What is the administrations attitude?
3. What team approach is taken when you have a problem with a student? Who is on the team and what is its purpose? Does it have an official name?
4. How is the interaction between the administration, teachers, students and family’s?
5. Do you feel like you are on a team?
6. How do you insure that you understand each other?
7. Are the rules and goals for teachers and students well defined and acceptable?
8. Is the administration insuring the goals are being met and if not, what is being done about it?
9. Do you feel a team approach to problem solving is being taken?
10. How do you address problem behavior? What are your tools and tactics?
11. What are the systems you have in place to systemically respond to problematic behavior?

The follow up interviews were not preformatted, the shape of the questions varied according to the flow of the conversation. The consistent themes for the questions and discussions with the vice-principal include:

- How he felt about the team, how much impact it had on him and his relationship to the other teacher’s students, and families.
- How he stays in touch with them, meaning the parents and the other teachers.
- If it has helped, how he defined problem behavior and what it looked like, how he dealt with it.
- Why and when he implemented an SBS and/or an ISP.
- How he handled conflict, bullying stealing and other problematic behaviors.
Addendum 3

**Question 1:** How do you rate the administration and Student Care Team in handling problems or incidents relating to conflict/mobbing, stealing and vandalism?

Response:
7 Excellent
18 Good
1 No response

**Question 2:** The # of years the student had been at the school?

**Question 3:** Do you feel safe at school?

Response:
25 Yes
1 No

**Question 4:** In general, how do you rate the incidents of conflict/mobbing, stealing, vandalism? Have they gone down since you started school?

Response:
2 Increased
14 Stay the same
8 Gone down
2 Disappeared

**Question 5:** Have you been a victim of theft, conflict/mobbing?

Response:
9 Yes
17 No

**Question 6:** Did you report it?

2 Yes
7 No
Question 7: Was the response:

2 Excellent

Question 8: Do you feel the administration and Student Care Team cares about you as an individual?

Yes
3 No
5 No response
Content of and attitudes towards an intervention program. School administrators’ and students’ perceptions

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