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**Title:** Time-out: an evaluation of rebound facilities  
**Issue Date:** 2015-09-30
1. General Introduction

In 2008 the board of the network of collaborating secondary schools in the region South Holland-West, located in The Hague, invited researchers of the Institute of Clinical Child and Adolescent Studies at Leiden University to investigate the quality and effectiveness of their Rebound facilities. Rebound facilities are out of school time-out programs for secondary school students who disturb school order and jeopardize school safety, hence show maladaptive behavior. The Rebound policy is based on two goals: (1) offering care and interventions for students who are referred, and (2) establishing a positive and safe school climate for their non-referred peers. The present dissertation is focused on the fit between referred students’ characteristics and the program offered in Rebounds, the effects of Rebound facilities on students’ social adjustment, and the association between leisure activities and school adjustment.

Suspension and Expulsions

A referral to a Rebound is a likely alternative for suspensions or even expulsions. The Dutch Inspectorate of Education (2013) reported a total of 5955 suspensions and expulsions in the school year 2012-2013. The suspensions lasted at least one day. These suspensions and expulsions involved 0.6% of the total student population (958,917 students). Schools register and monitor their suspensions and expulsions in the IRIS Safety and Security School System. In 2011 this system registered two trends: (1) an increase in the severity of incidents (such as theft and physical violence), and (2) a decrease in incidents in general. The frequency of incidents went down from 7,038 incidents in the school year 2006-2007 to 3,770 incidents in 2010-2011. The researchers using the register provided no convincing explanation, but suggested that results might be invalid, because not all incidences can be easily observed and registered. Overt physical aggression, for instance, is often readily observable, but more covert forms of aggression like bullying and gossiping are more difficult to observe. Further evidence that the information may be invalid comes from national surveys in which students in vocational high schools report experiences with problem behavior. These have reported continuously high levels of incidences between 1996 and 2010 (Statistics Netherlands, 2011). In addition, clientele for youth care services was growing. Use of youth care services showed a yearly average increase of approximately 7.4% from 1997 to 2007 (De Graaf, Schouten, & Konijn, 2005; Van Yperen, 2009). Rebound facilities, originally launched in 2004, in 2006 had 850 places for over 2,700 students and in 2008 1,500 places for 4,500 students (De Greef & Van Rijswijk, 2006; Van der Steenhoven & Van Veen, 2008). In approximately the same period referrals to schools for special needs education, mainly those for students with psychiatric and psychosocial
disorders (cluster 4 schools) grew with 17.5% (Van Yperen, 2009). Hence, at least doubts about a reduction of the incidences of students’ problematic behaviors in school seem justified; the number of such incidences may actually have increased.

**Rebound Facilities**

In their yearly report for 1998 the Inspectorate of Education (1999) for the first time reported a growing need for time-out facilities that are meant to cater for the needs of students who were expelled due to their maladaptive behavior and not accepted in another school for this same reason. The murder of a secondary school deputy in The Hague in 2004 fueled the public debate regarding school safety and order in the Netherlands. In response, the Dutch Ministry of Education introduced the so-called Rebound facilities by changing the already existing time-out facilities. Rebounds were supposed to achieve drastic behavioral changes by using a strict and, if necessary, punitive educational approach towards students. In addition, they were to increase active student participation before returning the students to their mainstream schools (Van der Hoeven, 2004).

Since the start in 2004 the number of available places in Rebounds increased with 8% per year (Van der Steenhoven, Messing, & Van Veen, 2012). Most students in Rebounds are boys (63%), come from junior vocational high schools (83%), and are mostly referred due to their externalizing behaviors (Kuijvenhoven, 2007). Seventy-five percent of referred students return to their mainstream school, 13% are referred to special needs classes and the other 10% are placed in other mainstream schools or apprenticeship programs (Kuijvenhoven, 2007). According to the Inspectorate of Education (2007) the Rebound facilities generally succeed in returning students to mainstream schools and motivate students, increase their academic interests, build their self-assurance, and achieve parent involvement in students’ academic careers. However, the curriculum offered at Rebound facilities does not always cover students’ educational needs. A variety of schools differing in educational approach, cognitive and linguistic entry requirements and contents and levels of exams refer students to Rebounds. Rebounds do not succeed in adapting to the broad variety of educational needs linked to these differences between referring schools. Furthermore, the school inspectorate reported a lack of clear referral criteria. This means that students not only differ as to the competences that school curricula are meant to influence, but also in the behaviors that schools actually appear incapable of influencing in a sufficiently positive way, and, hence, lead to referrals.

The term ‘Rebound’ refers to a second chance. Rebound facilities engage the students in a program aimed at behavioral change and increased school engagement, and also invest in a preparation for the students’ return to the referring school (School Inspectorate, 2007; Van Veen, Van der Steenhoven, & Kuijvenhoven, 2007). Rebound facilities provide classes away from students’
school, and ensure that referred students cannot disturb instruction and learning in the schools that referred them. They function as a time-out group for six to thirteen weeks. A Rebound class has a maximum capacity of 12 students. Student have weekly homework assignments provided by their own school, and supervised by Rebound staff. In addition, Rebound facilities offer a 10 week EQUIP training aiming to improve students’ moral and social skills and reduce cognitive distortions. Rebound facilities do not use set starting dates, but can cater for schools’ urgent needs to provide a time-out for a problematic student at any time.

**An International Perspective**

Rebound is a type of alternative educational programs. Alternative educational programs serve students who are at risk for school failure within the mainstream educational system and are based on the thought that providing more individualized instructions for these students can increase school success (Lehr, Tan, & Ysseldyke, 2009). Programs may be organized within schools (i.e., traditional settings) or outside the school – in a separate building (i.e., nontraditional settings) (Aron, 2006; Lange & Sletten, 2002; Lehr, Tan, & Ysseldyke, 2009; Reimer & Cash, 2003).

Lehr, Tan, and Ysseldyke (2009) conducted a survey on so-called alternative education programs in 48 states of the USA. They found that such programs are mostly delivered in non-traditional school settings in separate buildings on the school premises or even on off-school grounds, with classrooms set aside for disruptive students. Furthermore, more than a third of the states indicated that alternative schools in their states primarily serve disciplinary purposes. The authors’ review of state legislation and policy of alternative education revealed that many states have established enrollment criteria which commonly include some form of at-risk criteria like being suspended or expelled from a regular school, being disruptive in the general education environment, and being academically non-successful in a regular school. Other at-risk criteria used are frequent truancy, physical abuse, substance use, and homelessness. Most of the states also had legislation facilitating the referral of suspended and expelled students to these alternative programs, which suggests that alternative education is primarily used for students who are excessively disruptive in regular classrooms. The authors, as well as other scholars (Skiba & Knesting, 2002), suggest that eventually this will lead to alternative programs increasingly becoming “dumping grounds”.

The diverse populations and unique features of such programs have made that there are hardly empirical studies on the characteristics of the students enrolled in these programs and on the program characteristics, let alone on their effectiveness (Aron, 2006; Barr & Parrett, 2001; Cox, 1999; Foley & Pang, 2006; Hosley, 2003; Powell, 2003; Tobin & Sprague, 2000; Wraight, 2010). The available studies, however, reveal that the majority of the students are poor, bilingual and belong to
minority communities (Carswell, Hanlon, O'Grady, Watts, & Pothong, 2009; Foley & Pang, 2006; Lehr et al., 2004; Powell, 2003). Some evaluation studies have found that available programs may produce short-term effects on GPA, school attendance, and a better self-esteem, but fail in reducing delinquent behaviors (Cox, 1999; Raywid, 1998). Others voice that when the programs are used for receiving suspended or expelled students the programs are nothing but a short-term solution to what often is a long-term problem, suggesting that there are little positive consequences of such exclusionary practices (Osher, Bear, Sprague, & Doyle, 2010; Skiba & Knesting, 2002). While the intention is to contribute to a safe school climate and prevent further development of misbehavior, punitive approaches to discipline have been found related to subsequent antisocial behavior (Gottfredson, Gottfredson, Pane, & Gottfredson, 2005) and increased prospects of future school drop-out (Clonan, McDougal, Clark, & Davison, 2007; Osher, Morrison, Bailey, 2003). Furthermore, bringing together antisocial students and separating them from more positively adjusted peers may increase antisocial behavior (Dishion, Dodge, & Lansford, 2006), particularly when this separation or exclusion is experienced as unfair (Van Acker, 2007).

This thesis may be seen as an attempt to avoid that Rebounds become “dumping grounds” for suspended and expelled students in the Netherlands. It clarifies the characteristics of the students who visit the Rebounds, whether these characteristics meet the formal criteria used for referrals, and whether the available curriculum fits the educational needs of the students. Last, but not least, it studies the effectiveness of Rebound facilities.

**Design and Participants**

The main purpose of the presented studies in this dissertation is to study the quality and effectiveness of Rebound facilities. EQUIP is an important component of the curriculum and hence, our initial goal was to analyze and evaluate the EQUIP program offered in Rebound facilities. Due to Rebound teachers desire to maintain students’ privacy, we were only allowed to visit the Rebounds to supervise students’ completion of questionnaires. Hence, we could not visit Rebounds frequently and were not allowed to attend and observe EQUIP lessons. Our eventual design reflects these limitations.

Data collection spanned a period of thirty months, divided in two periods. In the first period, the first ten months, data was collected online and a file analysis was conducted on (teacher) referrals. For the second period, data was collected in three Rebound facilities and in the referring secondary schools in The Hague, the Netherlands. Questionnaires were administered in students’ first week in the Rebound, before starting any behavioral interventions. Rebounds do not have a set starting or entrance day. In order to respond accurately to schools’ urgent needs to find an
alternative setting for disruptive students, Rebounds offer continuous access. Therefore, weekly phone sessions were used to gain information on the entrance and leave of students.

For comparing referred students with their non-referred peers (chapter two, three and four) mainstream schools were recruited. Four mainstream junior vocational high schools took part in our study. All four schools were part of the network of collaborating secondary schools but only three of the schools actually referred students to participating Rebound facilities. Schools were invited to select classes with the most behaviorally problematic students (potential referrals) for participation.

For chapter 4, paper three, we used a pre-posttest design and created a control group by selecting 77 students with externalizing behaviors from three of the mainstream schools. In severity their problems were comparable to the problems of referred students.

The Structure of the Thesis

The first paper, chapter 2, reports a profile analysis of students sent to Rebound facilities. This paper addresses the question what type of student is sent to the Rebound facility? The second paper, chapter 3, compares students sent to Rebound facilities and their non-referred peers on their externalizing and antisocial behaviors. It answers the question whether or not students in Rebounds and their non-referred peers do differ with respect to their externalizing and antisocial behavior, to an extent that justifies referrals to Rebounds. Furthermore, predominantly American studies suggest that ethnic minority students have a disproportionately higher chance of being referred to a special program for suspended and expelled students (e.g., Skiba & Knesting, 2002). We wanted to find out whether this is the case in the Netherlands as well. The third paper, chapter 4, studies the effect of Rebounds using a quasi-experimental pre- and posttest design, exploring changes in externalizing, antisocial behaviors and cognitive distortions. In the fourth paper, chapter 5, Rebound students are compared to non-referred students on their leisure and family activity participation. More specifically, we analyze whether leisure and family activities are associated with school adjustment.

Previous studies have shown that adolescents who engage in unstructured leisure activities, without adult supervision, are more likely to develop antisocial behaviors, especially when deviant peers join in (c.f., Dodge, Dishion, & Lansford, 2006; Osgood & Anderson, 2004). Partaking in structured activities, on the contrary, have been found related to higher academic engagement and performance (Cooper, Valentine, Nye, & Lindsay, 1999; Eccles & Barber, 1999; Jordan & Nettles, 1999), lower prevalence of school dropout (Davalos, Chavez, & Guardiola, 1999; Mahoney, 2000), less antisocial behavior (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Mahoney & Stattin, 2000), and improved school adjustment (Fredricks & Eccles, 2006; Marsh & Kleitman, 2002; Vandell, Shernoff, Pierce, Bolt, Dadisman, & Brown, 2005). In addition, we explore the role of the involvement in family activities,
because time spending with family appears to be related to fewer problem behaviors and delinquency (Barnes, Hoffman, Welte, Farrell, & Dintcheff, 2007), less substance abuse (Barnes et al., 2007; Flannery, Williams, & Vazsonyi, 1999), and lower susceptibility to peer pressure (Flannery et al., 1999).
References


