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Teacher Perceptions of Using Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports as Behavioral Interventions in a Pre-K-5 Elementary School: A Phenomenological Study

A dissertation

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

by

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December 2017

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Keywords: Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports, Behavioral Interventions, Social Validity, Sustainability

ABSTRACT

Teachers' Perceptions of Using Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports as Behavioral Interventions in a Pre-K-5 Elementary School: A Phenomenological Study

by

Meghann E. Roberts-Clawson

This qualitative study addresses teacher perceptions of using positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS) as positive behavioral interventions. This phenomenological study was conducted within a Pre-K-5 elementary school in northwestern North Carolina. In order to collect qualitative data, personal individualized interviews were conducted from a purposeful sample of teachers in the school who have experience implementing more intensive positive behavioral interventions.

By analyzing data derived from the interviews and classroom and individualized documentation, the researcher was able to identify themes such as teachers' perceptions in regards to using PBIS as a behavioral intervention. Themes elaborating on the ways that teachers implement PBIS in their classroom as well as the most consistently used elements of the PBIS framework also emerged from this study.

Findings from this study will be useful in helping to implement the PBIS framework to fidelity as well as helping to sustain these practices. This information will be vital in training new

teachers that join the staff as well as veteran teachers who are struggling with individual students' behavior.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the loved ones watching from above, who I know are more proud than anyone! Thank you to my beloved grandparents who all valued education and the places it will take you. This is for my sweet family who have never stopped believing in me, even when I didn't believe in myself.

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Joshua Clawson, you're a saint; thank you for giving 150% to make sure this ship stayed afloat while I chased my dreams. To my beloved parents who taught my brother and me to be compassionate, never let anything stand in the way of your dreams, and to respect all of God's creatures. No matter what I have done, you never thought my dreams were too big; you will always be my biggest cheerleaders. Mom taught me to always take care of others, while Dad taught me the value of building relationships in a school building. It is because of you that I am who I am today.

To my family (both blood and chosen): words can never express all that you mean to me. Your love and unwavering encouragement didn't go unnoticed.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

It is the general consensus among the American public that student behavior is out of control and is getting increasingly more troublesome (Simonsen, Sugai, & Negron, 2008). Traditionally, punishment has been seen as the most effective and time efficient approach to rectifying problem behavior (Swain-Bradway, Swoszowski, Boden, & Sprauge, 2013). When schools set rules and they are broken, they often respond by “getting tougher”, investing in security and punitive type punishments such as “zero tolerance” policies that have not been shown to have a positive impact on student behavior (Skiba & Peterson, 2000).

According to teachers, there has been an increase in negative student behavior which they attribute to the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) (US Department of Education, 2011), the reauthorization of the IDEA (2004), along with changes in curriculum and standardized testing (Hunter et al., 2015; Scott & Cooper, 2013; Sugai, Lewis-Palmer, & Hagan, 1998). The NCLB gave federal money to all public schools throughout the country, however, these schools were required to measure up to certain standards. The goal of NCLB was to ensure that all students would be proficient in math and reading, while their schools were responsible for having effective classroom management strategies in place to deal with problem behaviors (No Child Left Behind Act, 2001). According to an article in Education USA (2011), public schools around the United States are caught in the throws between providing the “free appropriate public education” (Office for Civil Rights, 2007) that all students deserve and obtaining the funding and resources to accomplish this task. Due to budget cuts and teacher shortages in highly qualified areas, general education teachers are being asked to do more than ever, with less resources, causing increasing stress among educators (Montrosse & Young,

2012). Classroom sizes and stress levels increased, making it a challenging environment for teachers to control behaviors and maintain appropriate and supportive learning environments (Cregor, 2008). As students' inappropriate behaviors have escalated, it has required educators to adapt their teaching strategies to address these challenges, maintaining a positive classroom to ensure learning is taking place (Walker, 1993).

Research has shown a relationship between behavior issues and academic achievement (Akey, 2006; Flynt, 2008; Wexler, 1992). Any educator can testify to the impact that negative behavior has on the amount and quality of instruction taking place in the classroom, which has an impact on the academic outcome for all students (Kagan & Kagan, 2009; Scott & Barrett, 2003; Wexler, 1992).

“It is estimated that approximately 10% of children and adolescents in the United States suffer from some form of mental illness that significantly impairs their ability to function in everyday settings” (Burns et al., 1995; Shaffer et al., 1996). According to a study done by the Surgeon General on mental health in 1999, there are 6 to 9 million youth with emotional problems who are not receiving the help that they need (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1999). Burns et al. (1995) and Leaf et al. (1996) reported a large discrepancy between students who need services and those that are actually obtaining help; 16% of youth are receiving services, 75% of which are received at school because schools have constant contact with youth (Adelman & Taylor, 1999; Weist, 1997). This accessibility creates the perfect environment to prevent, identify, and implement interventions that may develop into more serious issues later in life (Weist, 1999). According to McIntosh, Horner, et al. (2008), 10.3% of 16 to 24 year olds were high school dropouts in 2004, 32.4% between ages 16 and 19. Dropping out of school put

these kids at higher risk of poor adult outcomes such as lower income, unemployment, and cost taxpayers billions of dollars in assistance, crime prevention and prosecution.

Being cognizant of the demands to meet standards both with academics and behaviors, multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) was developed. MTSS was implemented to be the overseeing body of both response to intervention (RtI) for academics and positive behavior interventions and support (PBIS), dealing with behaviors (Harlacher, Sakelaris, & Kattelman, 2013; Hunter et al., 2015). The PBIS framework is a “proactive, system-level approach that enables schools to effectively and efficiently support student behavior” (Simonsen et al., 2008). As this is a framework, it can be tailor-made for individual schools by having them to select specific outcomes, data, practices, and systems that are important for their population. When schools implement SWPBS (School-wide Positive Behavior Supports), research has shown decreases in the instances of negative behavior as measured by office discipline referrals (ODR) (Bohannon et al., 2006; Bradshaw, Reinke, Brown, Bevans, & Leaf, 2008; Kelm, McIntosh, & Cooley, 2014; Scott & Barrett, 2004; Swain-Bradway et al., 2013). Along with a diminishing number of negative behavioral instances, studies have shown an increase in instructional time, which helps to support students academically (Feuerborn, Wallace, & Tyre, 2013; Lassen, Steele & Sailor, 2006; Luiselli, Putnam, Handler, & Feinberg, 2005).

Unlike punitive discipline methods that have been historically used in education (Maag, 2001), using PBIS, educators do not procrastinate while a child continues to struggle. Teachers begin implementing the framework on the first day of school and use these ideals in every area of the school all throughout the school day for every student. SWPBS uses a three-tier approach to support behavior management to “(a) proactively address the social behavior needs of all students and (b) prevent social and academic failure (Simonsen et al., 2008; Sugai & Horner,

2002; Sugai et al., 2000; Walker et al., 1996). The first tier is designed to be the core behavior instruction for all students throughout the school. Students who are not able to demonstrate desired behaviors are then referred to the PBIS team to be moved in to the secondary or tertiary tiers to receive more intensive behavioral instruction.

Statement of the Problem

All around the country, more than 18,000 school systems have adopted the PBIS framework to attempt to implement more positive behavior interventions as opposed to punitive methods that have been used previously (Swain-Bradway et al., 2013). The problem with this shift is that many initiatives such as these come from a top-down approach. Educators will tell you that new initiatives are implemented, thousands of dollars are spent on training, they spend hours in meetings, and then there is no follow through. Teachers begin to be skeptical of changes, which creates issues with social validity (Datnow, 2005). In order to sustain any sort of project, it is pivotal that administrators and classroom teachers are on board (Feuerborn & Chinn, 2012; McIntosh et al., 2014). When educational initiatives are not implemented to fidelity, educators do not obtain the results they have hoped, letting programs and frameworks, such as PBIS, dwindle and eventually become one of the many proposals that are eventually abandoned (Adelman & Taylor, 2007; Hieneman, Dunlap, & Kincaid, 2005; Kok, 2014; Marchant, Heath, & Miramontes, 2012).

Extensive research studies on the PBIS framework are all positive to show that the framework is effective. However, it is important to the researcher to look beyond these findings for the overall school population, to find teachers' perspectives of the effectiveness both of the framework and individual tier II and III interventions. Although it is teachers who ultimately implement the framework, it is student and educators' perceptions of PBIS that ultimately define

whether the program is accepted, effective, and sustained (Frey, Park, Browne-Ferrigno, & Korfhage, 2010; Kok, 2014). Teachers are the most powerful tool in the educational system (Steinbrecher, McKeown, & Walther-Thomas, 2013), so it is important that we not only help to educate them on how to implement this framework to fidelity, but we get their perspective to better support them in this transition.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to investigate elementary school teacher perceptions of using positive behavior interventions and support as behavior interventions in one Pre-K-5 school in rural Northwestern North Carolina.

Significance of the Study

This research study is significant as it helps to fortify the body of knowledge available pertaining to using positive behavior interventions as behavior interventions. The research findings will supplement our knowledge of educational research on using positive behavior interventions and teacher perceptions of using the PBIS framework as a means of increasing desired behaviors. The importance of this study is to explore teachers' perceptions regarding using more positive discipline methods within their classrooms along with which interventions they have found success using with students who struggle to show behavioral progress with only tier I interventions. This study demonstrates the need for more scholarly research on systemic challenges to implementing new educational initiatives in the classroom with increasing academic demands. It also calls for more research regarding the amount of time lost to dealing with problematic behaviors and the effects on standardized test scores. This study not only looks at teachers' perception of positive behavior interventions, it also gives their beliefs regarding

challenges to implementing the framework. As many school districts across the US are shifting to this sort of mentality regarding classroom management, this information could be useful in helping to support schools as they adopt this type of educational initiative and can be used for training purposes.

Another significance from this study is that it may serve to exercise the need for reform of teacher training and preparations in the area of classroom management strategies as well as basic knowledge of how to implement the PBIS framework into their future classrooms. Teachers have always expressed a need for more training on classroom management, but being cognizant of the demands of educators and this nationwide shift to more positive disciplinary methods, teacher education programs could use this research to help better prepare teachers for what is to come upon graduation.

Research Questions

This research will be driven by the following general questions:

1. What are elementary school teacher perceptions regarding the value of using PBIS as behavioral interventions?
2. What are elementary school teacher perceptions of challenges of using PBIS as behavioral interventions?
3. Which behavioral intervention(s) has shown to be the most successful in elementary classrooms?
4. Which behavioral intervention(s) has shown to be the least successful in elementary classrooms?

Limitations and Delimitations

Although the researcher has already developed strong rapport with individuals working in the school in question, this could also create bias in their answers, as they may not feel comfortable sharing how they truly feel about behavior interventions. For this reason, the researcher will not be the one actually conducting these personal and group interviews. The proxy interviewer will be the one conducting interviews and taking notes on discussion.

As with any study, there are limitations to the findings. For this study, the limitations include sample size and method. McMillan and Schumacher (2014) stated that sample size should be related to the needs of the study, which are extensive, rich descriptions of the phenomenon. This study is also only conducted in one school because although using PBIS as behavioral interventions is a district-wide initiative, each school is in a different stage of implementation. These results are not generalizable to any other population because of the qualitative nature of the study.

For this study, the researcher sought to examine elementary school teachers' perceptions of using positive behavior interventions and supports as behavioral interventions. The purposeful sample of teachers included teachers who currently have students in tier II or III, or have had them since adopting the PBIS framework. Although the sample included 11 Pre-K-5 teachers, coincidentally, these teachers came from grades kindergarten thru third grade. There are also teachers who have never referred a student to the PBIS team for any sort of intensive behavior modifications. There could be a number of reasons that no interventions are documented above the third grade, however, in a research study by Pas, Waasdorp, and Bradshaw (2015) results showed a very small percentage of upper grades children were receiving

the same interventions as lower grades. The researchers believed that there was a developmental expectation that lower grades teachers would help to teach behaviors.

This study was delimited to a sample population of elementary teachers who have experience implementing intensive positive behavior interventions in one Pre-K-5 elementary school in Northwestern North Carolina. Even though there are additional classroom teachers within this school who would be available to give data on using PBIS, the selected sample could best contribute information to assist in understanding teacher perspectives. This information will be used to help formulate an essence of experience of the phenomenon of their shared experiences regarding students with increased need for behavior interventions and its effectiveness.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined below in the interest of better understanding the purpose of this study.

- 1. Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA)**- Assess the relationship between a behavior and the surrounding environment to create effective intervention plans (Scott & Cooper, 2013)
- 2. Office Discipline Referral (ODR)**— A process in which the student is referred to the school office to meet with an administrator due to the severity of behaviors
- 3. PBIS**, also known as **PBS** or **SWPBIS**- “A broad range of systemic and individualized strategies for achieving important social and learning outcomes in school communities while preventing problem behavior. The key attributes for PBIS include preventive activities, data-based decision making, and a problem solving orientation” (Ohio Department of Education, 2015, p.1)

4. **SET-** An assessment tool “designed to assess and evaluate the critical features of school-wide effective behavior support across each academic school year” (Sugai, Lewis-Palmer, Todd, & Horner, 2005, p.1)
5. **Social Validity-** The measure of how well a social program is accepted by those who will benefit from it (Marchant et al., 2012). Wolf (1978) first introduced this idea as a measure of three areas: “(a) the social significance of identified treatment goals, (b) the social appropriateness to procedures utilized in achieving treatment goals, and (c) the social importance of research effects and outcomes”.
6. **Sustainability-** “A practice’s potential for durable implementation with high fidelity when considering features of the practice, its implementation, and the context of implementation (McIntosh et al., 2013)

Overview of the Study

The aim of this study was to further explore elementary school teachers’ perceptions towards using positive behavior interventions as intervention strategies in one rural Pre-K-5 elementary school in Northwestern North Carolina. The researcher analyzed weekly documents and conducted individual interviews and group discussions to write a collective narrative of their attitudes towards the effectiveness of the PBIS framework as well as individual behavior interventions. The central question of this research, “What are teachers’ perceptions of using positive behavior interventions and support as behavior interventions?” will permit the chance for the participants to give the researcher a deeper, in-depth description of the underlying phenomenon in the study.

This study includes a total of five chapters. Chapter 1 presents a need for this research through an introduction to the study, states the problem behind the research, lists research

questions, defines significant terms to understand the research, and reviews any limitations and delimitations of the study. Chapter 2 exhibits an extensive list of scholarly research on the topic broken down into themes which help to support the study. Chapter 3 holds the researcher's rigorous plan to complete the study along with methodology and design. Chapter 4 gives the research findings including the researcher's interpretation of the qualitative data and the coding that is done to help organize the data. Chapter 5 will summarize the findings of the study along with implications to direct further research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

This dissertation aims to inform you about positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS) including a collective background history, an explanation of the framework, current perceptions of PBIS, and the importance of social validity.

While PBIS has paralleled research findings from the fathers of educational psychology, there is still much to be learned about it. Eliminating punitive disciplinary methods and starting to utilize more positive behavioral interventions is the current shift in in the United States in a wide range of educational settings (Swain-Bradway et al., 2013). There is a plethora of research to show all of the positive effects that this framework has had on students in various educational levels and settings, however, in order to achieve these effects, staff buy-in is pivotal. Research shows that in order to sustain initiatives such as PBIS, it is important to get the perspectives of your stakeholders (Hineman, Dunlap, & Kincaid, 2005; Kok, 2014; Miramontes, Marchant, Heath, & Fischer, 2011; Schwartz & Baer, 1991).

History of PBIS

In the 1980s, teachers expressed a need for effective behavior interventions with students struggling with various behavior disorders (Gresham, 1991; Sugai & Horner, 1999; Sugai & Simonsen, 2012; Walker et al., 1996). Researchers from the University of Oregon conducted a series of research studies to evaluate current behavior programs to collect data on effectiveness. This information was used to drive decisions about developing a more proactive behavior model with more explicit instruction for all students. This would then help to provide

professional development for educators, centered on a team of stakeholders, who would help assess student needs and implement interventions to increase student outcomes (Biglan, 1995; Colvin, Kame'enui, & Sugai, 1993; Horner, Sugai, & Anderson, 2010; Lewis & Sugai, 1999; Mayer, 1995; Sugai & Horner, 2002; Sugai & Simonsen, 2012). During the 1990s waves of change came through education, furthering the need for the implementation of a more positive behavior intervention system. During this time, nationwide grant was offered to establish what is now known as the National Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, which would help to streamline assistance to schools based on research findings to help support students with behavioral disorders. This honor was given to researchers from the University of Oregon, along with a partnership with Kansas, Kentucky, Missouri, and South Florida (Sugai et al., 2000; Sugai & Simonsen, 2012). For many years, special education teachers had been using behavior interventions for students with special needs, however, it was not until this time that there was a need presented for a program to meet the needs of all students. It was at this time, the Center on Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports and the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS) framework (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012) was developed.

Although the idea of the PBIS framework is a relatively new topic, the ideations which help to found it date back almost a century, paralleling all of the educational and behaviorist theories that were taught in an educational psychology course as part of new teacher preparations.

PBIS Connections to Behavioral Theories

Social Learning Theory

Bandura (1977) conducted research known as the “Social Learning Theory”, which states that “new patterns of behavior can be acquired through direct experience or by observing the behavior of others”. These actions are solidified by what sorts of rewards or punishment follow immediately after the action. People learn expect that certain actions will give them predictable outcomes based on past observations or experiences and the anticipated consequences. Future consequences can be used as motivators for current behavior much in the same way a child’s behavior could be affected by a consequence that follows. Social learning theory is reflected in current research on the implementation of PBIS by Bosworth and Judkins (2014), where they stress the importance of practicing appropriate behaviors in the same manner that academic skills are retaught. These expectations should be taught within the first two weeks of the school year through live demonstrations of the expected outcomes with role plays and discussions. These should be revisited after long breaks, transition times, or times of heightened excitement (Bosworth & Judkins, 2014). Teachers have seen the benefit, first hand, of role playing and modeling behaviors for students, which is aligned with Bandura’s Social Learning Theory, which states that people learn from each other through observation, imitation and modeling (Bandura, 1977).

B.F. Skinner (1974) introduced the notion of behaviorist principles, otherwise known as operant conditioning which is defined by reinforcers or punishments. Operant conditioning is a process in which both humans and animals learn how to behave to obtain the things they desire, while refraining from being punished (Staddon & Niv, 2008). Put in the scope of practice of the PBIS team, members are responsible for working to define problems and find functions of the

behavior, finds appropriate interventions, and helps to show the staff processes they should go through to help take care of the issue (Bosworth & Judkins, 2014; Lewis & Sugai, 1999). Although teachers have mentioned needing more training in the area of classroom management (Maag, 2002; Thompson & Webber, 2010), this notion of proactively handling students' behaviors has been around since the early days of Skinner's research. Skinner defined a reinforcer as what precedes a response, which will change the probability of that same event occurring again. These reinforcers are then categorized into consumables (food), manipulatives (toys), visual/auditory ("good work"), social stimuli (praise), or tokens (tickets) (Lefrancois, 2006). Maag (1996) discussed how teachers ignore children who are behaving the way we expect, and then give negative attention to those who are behaving inappropriately. Regardless, to a child who is exhibiting attention-seeking behaviors, any sort of attention can prove to be a powerful reinforcer. Punishment, adding a negative stimulus or taking away a positive one, does not decrease the likelihood of a behavior not occurring again; giving a positive reinforcement when a child demonstrates desired behavior, however, increases the probability that the behavior will happen again (Lefrancois, 2006; Skinner, 1974).

Cognitive Development

Piaget (1932) developed four different cognitive developmental stages that address children's intelligence and ability to reason through issues. These cognitive stages occur during specific age ranges: Sensorimotor, Preoperational, Concrete Operational, and Formal Operational. Students in elementary school, between the ages of 5 and 11, would match up with Piaget's Preoperational Stage (between the ages of 2 and 7) and Concrete Operational Stage (between the ages of 7 and 11). During elementary school, Piaget's stages of cognitive

development reveal that students in these age ranges are “capable of understanding their actions and make behavioral decisions based on their understanding” (Crowder, 2008; Piaget, 1932).

In the Preoperational Stage, children use symbolic functioning where they learn the use of mental symbol with words or pictures. Students have trouble understanding concrete logic and cannot mentally manipulate information; they struggle to see things from another point of view. Students do learn reversibility to work with numbers and classification where they are able to classify objects based on their appearance or other characteristics. Students become more flexible in their ability to reason, but still struggle to solve abstract problems. It is not until students enter the final stage, Concrete Operational, that they begin to understand their own behaviors and the sources that help them act appropriately, making adjustments to keep problems from occurring (Crowder, 2008; Piaget, 1932). Punitive classroom management tactics are unsuccessful because students will be in different cognitive stages, and some may never reach the final stage.

Psychosocial Development

Erikson (1950) created eight categories from his psychosocial stages, each building on one another, which required children to successfully complete the previous stage. Elementary school students fall into stage 3, the Initiative vs. Guilt stage, and stage 4, the Industry vs. Inferiority stage. In Initiative vs. Guilt, younger students are very imaginative, playing with others, and make decisions. These students become more independent, however, students who are not capable of playing with others are likely to feel guilty, which restricts their growth through the stages (Crowder, 2008).

In the Industry vs. Inferiority stage, older students begin to develop a deeper meaning of self-accomplishment as they learn to follow established rules, develop peer relationships, and experience academic success (Crowder, 2008; Piaget, 1934).

Emotional Development

Goleman (1995) added the perspective of emotional intelligence to this background of children's development. Emotional intelligence encompasses the ability to recognize and manage one's emotions as well as the emotions of others, learning to be intrinsically motivated and learn to manage relationships. Parents are originally responsible for teaching these emotional lessons from infancy until they reach school age. Being able to recognize emotions help students in a variety of ways (Crowder, 2008; Goleman, 1996). As children develop their emotional intelligence, they also strengthen their ability to manage their emotions. Building interpersonal relationships with teachers, other peers, and family is perhaps the most important social skill a student possesses. Emotional development of students in lower grades is demonstrated by displaying their ability to effectively self-motivate, showing sensitivity to the feelings of others, and building strong interpersonal relationships, which has been linked to fewer discipline problems at school.

Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow (1954) developed the Hierarchy of Needs based on an extensive body of research dealing with human motivation, specifically based on deficiency and growth needs. Within each level of deficiency needs, every lower level will supersede all the following levels; once an individual's needs have been satisfied, another deficiency will be detected. The four levels in

Maslow's theory are: (1) physiological: hunger, thirst, comfort; (2) security: safety; (3) belongingness: love, acceptance; (4) esteem: to be successful, gain approval and recognition.

While there is no empirical evidence to support Maslow's works, it is widely accepted. A child who is hungry, sleepy, stressed, or does not have a positive emotional connection will be unable to learn because these children's brains will emit chemicals that inhibit their learning until these needs are taken care of (TLL Educational Services, 2012). As children will act in a way that helps them get their needs met, this is support for children to develop personal connections with positive role models at school (Crowder, 2008).

Social Development Theory

Vygotsky posed the idea of the Social Development Theory (1978) that takes children's mental age into account when looking at their ability to learn. His theory of cognitive development is closely aligned with the work of Bandura on the social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) and Piaget's stages of cognitive development (Piaget, 1934). "The problems encountered in the psychological analysis of teaching cannot be correctly resolved or even formulated without addressing the relation between learning and development in school-age children" (Vygotsky, 1978). Children with equal levels of mental development demonstrate varying levels of competence when their learning was assisted by a teacher, which is known as the zone of proximal development. This is known as "the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978).

Although you can compare two students who have equal chronological ages, these children have come from different backgrounds and shared differing experiences. Vygotsky (1978) stated that children's learning begins far before coming to school, which causes some differences in their actual developmental level, the tasks that they can successfully achieve unassisted. This idea applies not only to academic learning, but also to social skills and behavioral concepts in schools. There are varying reasons as to why this happens, but some children have either attended pre-schools or have parents who have been working with students prior to entering school. Just as students come to school with varying knowledge of academic concepts, this rings true for behavior, social skills and coping strategies. Some children come to school, from the beginning, with serious behavior problems that were established long before they got their start in education (Lewis, Sugai, & Colvin, 1998; Tobin & Sugai, 2005). Schools are becoming increasingly responsible for teaching students desired behaviors in the classroom in order to decrease problem behavior and help support academic achievement.

The PBIS Intervention Model

Increased Need for Behavioral Interventions in Schools

“Teachers are one of the strongest factors in effective education systems” (Steinbrecher et al., 2013, p.1), so teacher preparation programs have tailored their programs to effectively educate these teachers in supporting students' learning. The notion of behavioral interventions are nothing new for special education teachers, as they have been using them for students with special needs for years. It was not until the development of the PBIS (pbis.org, 2017) framework that general education teachers saw the benefit and also began to implement these practices into their classrooms. Scholars have found that educators can misinterpret behaviors because their training does not do enough to prepare them in the way of culture and context (Fallon, O'Keefe,

Gage, & Sugai, 2012). Algozzine, Christian, Marr, McClanahan, and White (2008) reported that students with disabilities did not show a dramatically increased rate of problem behavior as compared to general education students, however, it was not until the last decade that special education students had been mainstreamed into the general education classroom (Steinbrecher et al., 2013). According to The Condition of Education (NCEE, 2011), special education students who spend more than 80% of the school day in the general education classroom has increased from 46% in 1998-1999 to 58% in the 2008-2009 school year. Given the decrease in highly qualified special education teachers and the increasing number of special education students (Steinbrecher et al., 2013), the responsibility for educating these students is being shared by special and general education teachers. Federal mandates such as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which requires that all students be proficient in reading and mathematics (US Department of Education, 2011), the reauthorization of the IDEA (2004), along with changes in curriculum, have accounted for counted changes in the behavior of students (Hunter et al., 2015; Scott & Cooper, 2013; Sugai et al., 1998).

Educators have often rated their ability to effectively handle problem behaviors as their biggest area of deficit. As there has been an increase in behavior issues with the mounting number of special education students being mainstreamed into general education classrooms, teachers have had to assume greater responsibility in trying to teach all students. Teachers have expressed worries about the amount of training they receive to deal with behavior issues (Feuerborn et al., 2013; Hemmeter, Santos, & Ostrosky, 2008), and are now more reserved about their ability to meet everyone's individual needs (Brownell, Adams, Sindelar, Waldron, & Vanhover, 2006; Cheney et al., 2010; Rosenzweig, 2009). Even one disruptive student impedes other students' ability to learn, but also takes the teacher's focus off of the entire classroom

(DuPaul, McGoey, Eckert, & Van Brakle, 2001). Dealing with these never-ended behaviors take a toll on teachers, wearing them down, causing stress, and increase their chances for burnout (Clunies-Ross, Little, Kienhuis, 2008; Lochman, Powell, Clanton & McElroy, 2006; Robbins, 2011).

To help support these teachers' concerns over the increasing instructional challenges, multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) were established (Harlacher et al., 2013; Hunter et al., 2015). "MTSS uses evidence-based techniques that provide varying levels of intensity to increase the achievement of all students (Harlacher et al., 2013, Hunter et al., 2015). The purpose of MTSS is to address students' struggles, both with academia or behavior, in a proactive manner. MTSS is the umbrella to two high-profile models, response to intervention (RtI) (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005; Hunter et al., 2015), dealing more with academic issues, and positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS), dealing with behaviors.

What is PBIS?

"Positive behavior support is an application of a behaviorally-based systems approach to enhance the capacity of schools, families, and communities to design effective environments that improve the link between research-validated practices and the environments in which teaching and learning occurs" (pbis.org, 2017, para. 1). This framework is an evidence-based multi-tier system to proactively address inappropriate behavior by teaching and reinforcing appropriate behavior (Bradshaw, Mitchell & Leaf, 2010; Horner et al., 2009; Scott & Cooper, 2013 Hunter et al., 2015; OSEP, n.d., Sugai & Horner, 2006). PBIS is a continuum of academic and behavior support that is comprised of three tiers of intervention; tier 1-primary prevention for everyone; tier 2-secondary prevention for targeted groups; and tier 3-tertiary prevention for more intensive, individualized interventions (Hunter et al., 2015; Sugai et al., 2000). The PBIS Intervention

Model is made up of five core components: (a) statement of purpose; (b) school-wide expectations; (c) procedures for teaching expectations; (d) continuum of procedures for encouragement; (f) procedures for using data to monitor impact (Coffey & Horner, 2012; Lewis & Sugai, 1999). There is a positive correlation between the intensity of behavior support necessary for a student and the increases in the behavior needs and challenges (Walker et al., 1996) because students who are unsuccessful with universal services are then referred to the PBIS team to receive more individualized and intensive interventions.

Teams including behavior specialists and administrators are in charge of overseeing the core elements of PBIS and help to provide training and policy support for (a) initial implementation phase, (b) active application, (c) and sustaining the core elements (Horner, Sugai, & Lewis, 2015; Sugai & Horner, 2010). The information shown in Figure 1, as referenced by pbis.org (2002), depicts a layout of the continuum of behavioral support. Each subsequent tier is layered with increased interventions, building from the previous tier. Following the introduction and reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (1997), there was a nation-wide increase in the utilization of PBIS. It was originally established to assist students with Behavior Disorders, however the focus was then spread to the general education population (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012). “PBIS is defined as a framework for enhancing the adoption and implementation of a continuum of evidence-based interventions to achieve academically and behaviorally important outcomes for all students” (Sugai & Simonsen, 2000, para. 2). Early research that was conducted by some of the founders from the University of Oregon found evidence to support the need for a more preventative, research-based, school-wide practice. This framework would use a team to help teach explicit social skills in a variety of areas on school grounds, would help to share information with other stakeholders, and collect

data to measure student outcomes (Colvin et al., 1993; Horner, Sugai, & Anderson, 2010; Lewis & Sugai, 1999; Sugai & Horner, 2002; Sugai & Simonsen, 2012).

Positive behavior interventions provide schools with an alternative discipline rather than suspension. Although these do result in safer school climates, they do not show sustainable change in behaviors and often have long-term negative impact on both the student and school (Brusnahan & Gatti, 2008; Kohn, 1996; Tillery, Varjas, Meyer, & Collins, 2010). This positive support system do not focus on the individual student and their behaviors, yet they allow administration to focus on the overarching school climate and negative behaviors on a large scale. This allows schools to create a more positive and safe learning environment (Brusnahan & Gatti, 2008).

The PBIS framework is implemented with all students, showing a decrease in negative and disruptive behavior (Bohannon et al., 2006; Bradshaw et al., 2008; Kelm et al., 2014; Scott & Barrett, 2004; Swain-Bradway et al., 2013). This allows teachers to provide more individualized instruction to students who need help reaching desired levels of positive behavior (Lewis-Palmer et al., 1999; Safran & Oswald, 2003; Sugai et al., 2000; Turnbull et al., 2002).

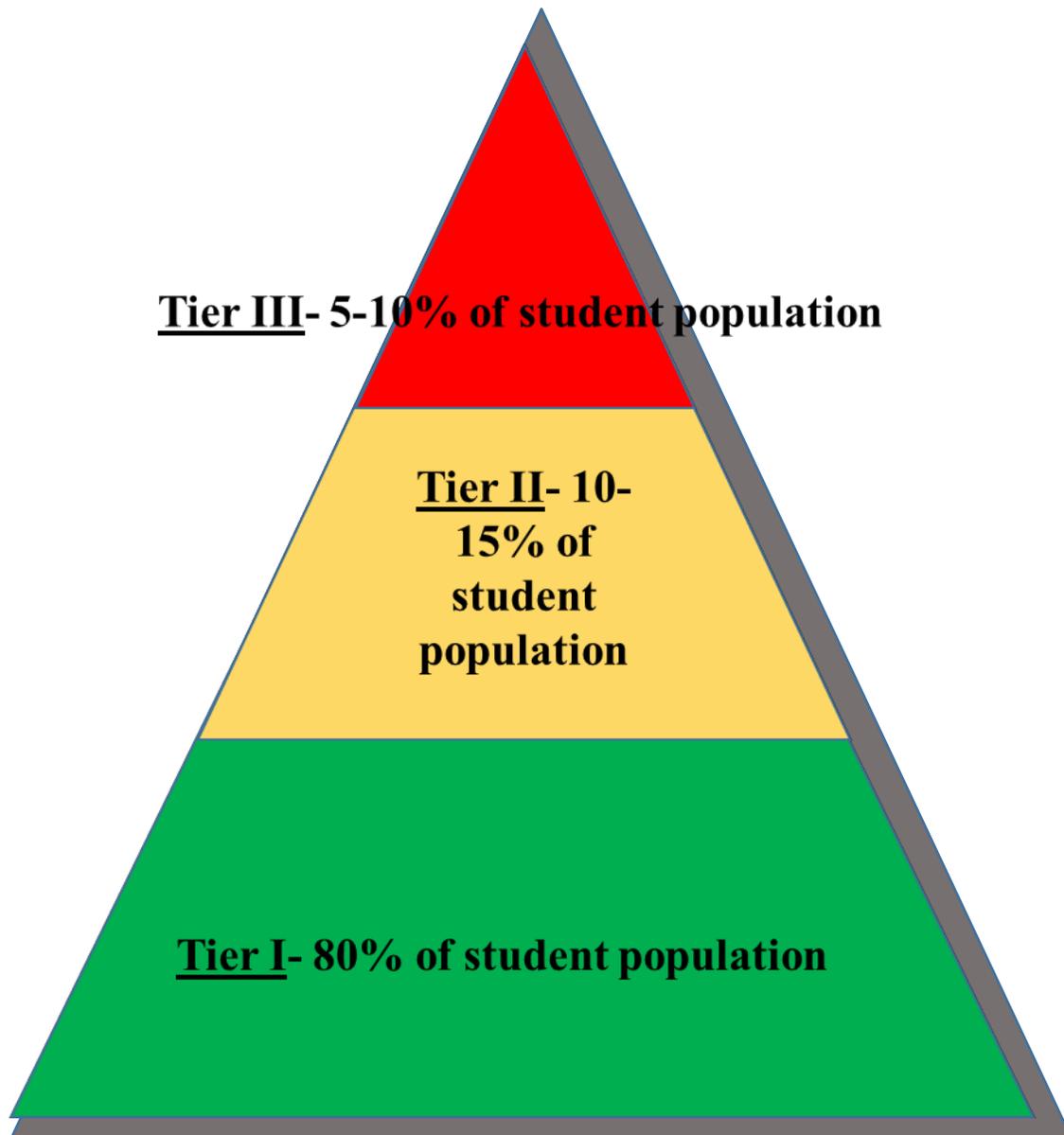


Figure 1. PBIS Model. (pbis.org, 2017).

Support for PBIS as a Behavioral Intervention

Even though PBIS as a behavioral intervention model is a newer concept, there is a wealth of research on various topics about its effectiveness. It is estimated that 1% to 7% of students have chronic behavior issues (Sugai et al., 2000), however, PBIS has consistently shown positive results for reducing behavior problems overall (Carr et al., 1999; Marquis et al., 2000; Safran & Oswald, 2003). Swain-Bradway et al. (2013) report that the PBIS framework is

currently being implemented in over 18,000 schools nation-wide which are showing positive results in the public school system as well as alternative educational settings such as alternative schools, residential settings, and juvenile justice facilities. Because studies have shown that students with untreated behavior issues often experience problems later in life (Sprague & Walker, 2000; Tobin & Sugai, 1999), it is important that these behaviors are addressed as early as possible (Forness et al., 2000). Bradshaw, Waasdorp, & Leaf (2012) stated, “A child who displays disruptive and aggressive behavior during their elementary school years is at a much higher risk for academic problems, being placed into a special education setting, school dropout, future substance abuse issues, and a list of antisocial behavior”.

“Most experts in the field agree that school-wide PBS is in its infancy (Dunlap, 2006; Safran & Oswald, 2003). However, the early results of positive behavior interventions implemented at the indicated level has a plethora of growing support for the effectiveness of the PBIS framework to help support students who are struggling with behavior (Lewis-Palmer et al., 1999; Safran & Oswald, 2003; Sugai et al., 2000; Turnbull et al., 2002). Sugai and Horner (2002) stated that when PBIS is “well implemented, it can enable most students to behave well”. Safran and Oswald (2003) stated that a universal PBIS program that uses various measures to collect data, utilizes direct observations, gauges teachers’ ratings, and consumer inventories, have resulted in extremely positive results for students across the grade span (Gottfredson et al., 1993; Nelson et al., 1996; Safran & Oswald, 2003). Walker et al. (1996) discussed the efforts that schools make to integrate all the services needed to meet the needs of children with antisocial and violent behaviors. Schools represent the most stable, consistent, predictable, prosocial environment for students for many students on a daily basis. Paralleling theories and research by Bandura (1977), Piaget (1932), Vygotsky (1978), Erikson (1950), and

Maslow (1954), the schools provide students with a lot of these basic needs and model these desired behaviors by using a proactive, positive discipline approach in order to increase their cognitive development.

With a rising issue of violent behaviors that are affecting schools, homes, and communities, interventions must be well planned and supported by everyone involved. Behavioral support systems must be proactive, instructional, sustained, and comprehensive are necessary to meet the needs of students who demonstrate negative behaviors. Students with severe behavior issues are most often times “referred to and access services well after the point where their problems can be successfully remediated” (Walker et al., 1996). Gorman-Smith et al. (2007) discusses the effectiveness of the School and Families Educating Children intervention due to their early intervention time which has been successful in reducing antisocial behavior. These behavioral issues included aggression, academic failure, and low social competence. By identifying these children earlier on, schools can have a much bigger impact, because as shown in Walker and Severson (1992), behavioral interventions show a significant decrease in effectiveness after students reach the third grade. The effects of a school-wide positive behavior interventions and support system shows the strongest positive effects with students who were first exposed to the program upon entering kindergarten (Bradshaw et al., 2012).

Thompson and Webber (2010) conducted a study at a public day school for children with disabilities using universal PBIS interventions as behavior support. Their sample consisted of 20 middle school students, however, only 10 of these students wound up completing the study because of some students being integrated back into the regular classroom because there was such an increase in their positive behavior or transferring out of the system. All 10 students in

the study demonstrated improvement in their behavior and showed more stabilized behavior patterns during the intervention.

Johnson (2016) reported that a teacher's behavior management style is predictive of their ability to implement PBIS to fidelity. The researcher referenced three types of management styles: interventionist (high teacher control), non-interventionist (high student control), and interactionalist (shared teacher and student control). They found based on their data that it was "reasonable to conclude that an overall non-interventionist or interactionalist style would have a higher possibility of fidelity than an interventionist.

CI-CO, or Check, Connect, and Expect (CCE) Program as it was named in their study, is supported by countless research studies over a 15 year period, showing the benefits of using daily progress reports to increase students' behavior (Davies & McLaughlin, 1989; Fairchild, 1987; Long & Edwards, 1994). Cheney et al. (2010) conducted a study over the course of 2 years in 18 urban schools with a diverse population, finding that this secondary intervention was effective with greater than 84% of the student population.

Nelson et al. (1996) piloted a universal approach included developing concise behavioral expectations for different locations and time periods throughout the school day. After conducting the Devereaux Behavior Rating Scale-School Form, results showed improvements in targeted students' behavior and academics.

Tobin and Sugai conducted a research study on all kindergarten, first grade, and second grade students in seven schools, for a total of 1066 students. The results indicated that school-wide PBIS is an effective intervention, especially when staff is trying to increase self-control. They also found that students who needed tertiary interventions were resistant to

interventions, so it was important to adjust the amount of intervention time that students were receiving (Tobin & Sugai, 2005). They found that the majority of students were successful with only primary interventions because 60% of participants did not require any more intensive services and the classroom management strategies were sufficient. 35% of students required some sort of additional support, either secondary or tertiary, meanwhile there was 5% who needed additional support, but time and resources did not allow. 27% of students were involved in CI-CO and 63% were getting support from tier III interventions.

In a study conducted by Wood, Ferro, Umbreit, and Liaupsin (2011), using FBAs with three preschool children with special education needs, produced “dramatic improvements in the students’ behavior”. The children’s on-task behavior was increased when the intervention was implemented to fidelity and was decreased when it was implemented incorrectly. All three students saw dramatic increases in the percentage of time that they spent on-task. Teachers assessed antecedents to the problem behavior and taught students a replacement behavior. This intervention was effective not only at school with teachers, but also with family members at home.

A sample of 12,344 elementary school children from 37 elementary schools were assessed about their behavior issues and prosocial behavior. After implementing SWPBIS (school wide PBIS), there were significant effects on the students’ behavior problems, concentration, social-emotional functioning, and abilities to use prosocial behavior. These students were found to be more on-task and were 33% less likely to receive an ODR than students in the comparison schools in the study. The results showed that there were much stronger effects for students who were first exposed to the framework in kindergarten and continued throughout elementary school (Bradshaw et al., 2015).

A study conducted by Scott and Barrett (2004) found a negative trend between the frequency of behavior incidents and the amount of time that schools have been participating in SWPBIS. This study took place over 3 years; there were 608 ODRs during the baseline year, 108 in year 1 of implementation and 46 in year 2. Translating these figures into time, the researchers estimated 10 minutes for processing time for each referral, dedicating 6,080 minutes during baseline, 1,080 during year 1, and only 460 minutes during year 2. That is a savings of 10.4 days in year 1 and 11.7 days in year 2. When looking at instructional time that is lost for disruptive behavior and ODRs, based on 20 minutes, decreased from 12,160 during baseline to 2,160 during year 1 and 920 in year 2.

Similarly, Kelm et al. (2014) found that ODRs were reduced from 518 to 252. This constituted a large savings in instructional time. Saving 266 ODRs represented an estimated 3,990 minutes of staff time, or eight hour working days. For students, this equaled 7,980 minutes or seventeen 6 hour days where they were not being sent outside the classroom.

Miramontes et al. (2011) studied the social validity of PBIS and found overall positive results from all stakeholder groups. Administrators were the most positive of all groups. 100% agree that PBIS was worth the time and effort and the majority also agreed that they would recommend to other educators. They strongly agreed that the program had improved school outcomes and had increased their knowledge and problem solving strategies. Teachers were also in agreeance that there was a positive impact on their school, the program was worth the time and effort, and they would recommend the program to other educators. 6.9% of respondents disagreed that the progress monitoring procedures were practical, 10% disagreed that the program was easy to implement, and 8.1% disagreed that the paperwork was practical. The related service providers

were satisfied with the program and 100% agreed that it had made a positive impact. 95.2% agreed that it was worth the time and effort and would recommend to other educators.

Lewis et al. (1998) studied the effects of a social skill instruction program and direct interventions on problem behaviors in an elementary school. These interventions were found to moderately decrease negative behaviors overall in areas such as lunch, recess, and transition. These effects were maintained up to three months out of the school year. While the interventions were not able to completely do away with the negative behaviors, the levels and frequency was reduced. Most of the problem behavior was attributed to the actions of a select few students, which was consistent with findings of Sugai and Horner (1994) who said that the majority of behavior problems come from 5 to 7% of the school population.

PBIS and Support for Academics

Behavior and academics go hand-in-hand; often it is hard to tell if a behavior issue has caused an academic issue, or if the academic issue is causing the prevalence of the behavior issue (Putnam, Horner, & Algazzine, 2006; Siegel, 2008). Research has been found to show that students who display serious problem behaviors also experience a large academic deficit as compared to other children, which are constant throughout time (Putnam et al., 2006; Siegel, 2008). Studies have shown academic and behavior issues as a strong predictor of high school dropout (Tobin & Sugai, 1999). Students who don't complete high school, wind up costing taxpayers billions of dollars in welfare, unemployment, crime prevention, and prosecution. Students who drop out of high school are more likely to experience unemployment and have lower incomes. Each added year of secondary education reduces public welfare dependency by 35% (McIntosh, Flannery, Sugai, Braun, & Cochrane, 2008).

With less time having to go to managing negative and disruptive behaviors in the classroom, teachers have more time for direct instruction (Scott & Barrett, 2004). The amount of instruction time has a highly positive correlation with student academic achievement. In a study of 6 classrooms who implemented positive behavior interventions, students' rate of on-task behavior increased by 24%, which supports research that shows that student academic engagement increases academic success (Putnam et al., 2006).

One study, conducted in Maryland, where SWPBIS was shown to be implemented to fidelity was linked to “improved organizational health”, “improved academic outcomes”, and “reductions in office discipline referrals” (Bradshaw, Leaf, & Debnam, 2007; Horner & Sugai, 2007; Siegel, 2008) and “reductions in teacher and student-reported incidents of bullying behavior” (Fallon et al., 2012).

Kelm et al. (2014) found overwhelming support for PBIS as it applies to academics. They used FSA scores for Grade 4 and 7 students in a school using PBIS and compared to other schools in the district. For Grade 4 students, there was a 44% increase in reading scores from the previous year, 56% increase in writing and a 25% increase in math scores. Other fourth grade classrooms saw a 3% drop in reading, 1% increase in writing, and 8% in math. Seventh grade students saw 9% increase in reading compared with the district's 7% and 35% increase in math scores compared to 4% in the district. The Grade 7 writing scores dropped 7%, however, the district saw a 21% decrease overall.

A potential explanation of nonresponse to Tier I interventions is due to academic deficits (McIntosh, Sadler, & Brown, 2012). In Grade 3, the educational focus is shifted from “learning to read” to “reading to learn” where their school day becomes flooded with reading, which can cause children who struggle to exhibit negative behavior to escape the task (McIntosh, Horner, et

al., 2008). There has even been research to suggest that academic interventions can help to improve behavior (Sugai & Horner, 1999). McIntosh, Horner, et al (2008) assessed DIBELS ISF score in kindergarten and correlated its effect on behavior to attempt to predict ODRs in the last year of elementary school. They found that the “phonological awareness and rapid letter-naming skills predicted unique variance in behavior outcomes” (McIntosh, Sadler, and Cooley (2012).

“Numbered Heads Together” (Kagan & Kagan, 2009) is an examples of a primary tier intervention that has been found to have great success. A study was conducted on the effects of on-task behavior and math quiz scores on Numbered Heads Together (NHT), on four different students with behavioral disorders in a self-contained classroom, both with and without incentives. NHT with incentives was found to increase on-task behavior rates to 94% and math quiz scores to 80%, while the standard method generated 76% on-task behavior and an average of 64% on math quizzes. Existing practices that teachers were already using were only effective in keeping students on task 48% of the time and achieving 26% on their math quiz. It is an alternative method to question students, both simultaneously and collaboratively, in discussions around grade level content. The teacher asks a question; each child shares their response among a small, homogeneous group and a group response is generated. Only one random teach member will be selected to share the group’s response. This strategy is proactive at decreasing negative behavior because it increases active student engagement, works on peer relationships, and helps to support student learning (Kagan & Kagan, 2009).

Tier I Interventions

Tier 1, or primary, PBIS interventions are considered to be the basic behavioral core instruction which is applied schoolwide to decrease problem behaviors (Cheney et al., 2010; pbis.org, 2017). Schools that decide to implement a school-wide PBIS program, must consider

four different elements: (a) defined and measurable results, (b) collect data to drive decision-making, (c) research and adopt evidence-based practices, (d) find ways to implement the framework to fidelity (Sugai & Horner, 2001; Tobin & Sugai, 2005). Taken from School Climate and Discipline: Going to Scale (Sugai & Horner, 2001), as cited by Tobin & Sugai (2005), “Schools that adopt a school-wide PBS (positive behavior system) approach have the following features:

- An agenda of primary prevention has priority and is visible school-wide.
- All students and staff members are taught the school-wide expectations and received regular and frequent opportunities to practice them and to be positively acknowledged when they use them.
- A majority (>80%) of students, staff and families can state the school-wide positive expectations and give a specific behavioral example for each.
- Positive school-wide behavioral expectations are defined, taught, and encouraged for all students using a range of positive and negative examples.
- Most contacts between teachers and students are prosocial (positive and preventive) rather than corrective and punishing (i.e., 5-8 positives for every negative interaction).
- A full continuum of PBS is available for all students at the school and district levels.
- Behaviorally competent personnel are readily available.
- A function-based approach serves as the foundation for addressing problem behaviors.
- All staff members actively participate in the implementation of school-wide PBS approach.

- Accurate and consistent implementation of PBS practices by all staff members is emphasized.
- The school administrator is an active participant and leader in the PBS effort.
- A school-wide leadership team guides the systemic adoption and sustained use of research-validated practices.
- School data are review at least monthly to guide decision making and planning”.

Lewis and Sugai (1999) explained that if all schools would take a more proactive approach to teaching their students consistent routines and expectations, and open student and staff communication was established, then students would likely demonstrate more desired behaviors. When positive behavior interventions are universally designed to be applied school-wide, positive effects will be achieved even for individuals who have severe behavioral issues (Horner, 2000).

Tier II Interventions

Because there is such an emphasis placed on relationships, mentors are chosen based on who the child has a close, positive relationship with. Richards (2006) found that students rated having a positive relationship with their teacher as the number one factor in that student being able to succeed. Before a student can be taught any actual knowledge, a positive relationship must be formed (Bell, 2003). It has been found that 40-60% of students become increasingly disengaged as they move through elementary school to middle and high school (Klem & Connell, 2003), with research that attributes this to the lack of connection with positive adults. Building relationships between teachers, parents, and peers is one of the most important social

skills that a student can have (Crowder, 2008; Goleman, 1996) and can be achieved through some of these secondary interventions.

Crone, Horner, and Hawkins (2004) developed a secondary intervention that is widely used for students who do not respond to the primary prevention, school-wide PBIS entitled, Check-In-Check-Out (CI-CO). This intervention has been shown to benefit students by increasing their academic engagement and successfully decreasing the number of office discipline referrals (ODRs) (Hawken & Horner, 2003; March & Horner, 2002; Tobin & Sugai, 2005). CI-CO is effective because it is (a) readily available, (b) increases positive contact with adults, (c) monitoring and frequent feedback, and (d) increased communication between home and school support systems (Cheney et al., 2010; Tobin & Sugai, 2005).

Each morning the student will check-in with a CI-CO coach or mentor who will determine if they have all the materials needed for the day and decide whether the child is prepared to go to class. The mentor offers words of encouragement and helps child work on their specific goal for the day, typically taking around 5 minutes. The child's teacher will monitor their behavior and will rate them so their mentor can see if they have met his or her goal. At the end of the school day, the child will return to their mentor to share their chart and reflect on the positives of the day, and what they can attempt to do a better job of the following day. The child will then take this form home to their parents to be signed so they can be aware of how their child's day has gone. The child's mentor will log the student's progress to make decisions about continuing, strengthening, or discontinuing the intervention over time (Cheney et al., 2010; Tobin & Sugai, 2005).

Tier III Interventions

Individual student supports are developed for those students who struggle with serious and chronic behavior issues that require most intensive and individualized instruction (Lewis & Sugai, 1999; Safran & Oswald, 2003; Turnbull et al., 2002). The reauthorization of IDEA (2004) was legislation that required school systems to conduct functional behavioral assessments (FBA) to support students with academic and behavioral issues (Scott & Cooper, 2013; Sugai et al., 1998) as well as those whose problem behavior could put them at risk of being placed in a special education program (Kennedy et al., 2001; Safran & Oswald, 2003). Through various research articles and studies, FBA's have proven effective for any student who is struggling to conform to the social demands of schools. A FBA is a tertiary behavioral intervention that is used to identify the function of child's challenging behavior to enable support personnel to develop more individualized interventions to support the student (Crone & Horner, 2003; Sugai, 1998; Sugai et al., 2000, Tobin & Sugai, 2005). This assessment allows adults to enter a child's perspective to respectfully develop individualized interventions that will help to decrease negative behaviors. FBA's give teachers the ability to teach students ways of getting positive consequences with a replacement behavior (Tobin & Sugai, 2005).

The steps to completing a FBA include: (1) defining the problem in its context, (2) determining the function of the behavior, (3) teaching the student a replacement behavior, (4) facilitate student success, (5) evaluate (Scott & Cooper, 2013). The framework's procedures place emphasis on assessing a student prior to implementation of an intervention, manipulating different antecedents to attempt to reduce the likelihood of a problem behavior, developing new social skills that could eliminate the behavior, redesign the consequences of behaviors, and

encouraging students to use more acceptable skills and replacement behaviors (Sugai & Horner, 2000).

Importance of Social Validity

Wolf (1978) first formally introduced social validity as an issue in the field of applied behavior analysis. Social validity is a gauge of the extent to which consumers (teachers, students, and parents) view a practice as “addressing socially significant goals, socially acceptable treatment procedures, and socially important intervention outcomes” (Lane et al., 2009; Schwartz & Baer, 1991; Wolf, 1978). Wolf (1978) warned that consumer’s nonacceptance could have a devastating effect on the implementation of new programs and procedures, however consumers are infrequently asked about their opinion. Since that time, conducting assessments on social validity has been an important predictor for the future of the field (Schwartz & Baer, 1991), as these results can be used to predict the rejection of a program long before it occurs. As with any new initiative, it is imperative that stakeholders believe that PBIS is socially valid to ensure the effective implementation and sustainability of the framework in the educational realm (Hieneman et al., 2005; Kok, 2014). “It is the buy-in of stakeholders and the fidelity of implementing evidence-based interventions that ensures success” (Marchant et al., 2012).

Social validity is determined by the groups that will benefit from a specific program, in this case, PBIS. Schwartz and Baer (1991) identified four categories of stakeholders who are ultimately impacted by the PBIS framework: (a) direct stakeholders, (b) indirect stakeholders, © members of the immediate community, and (d) members of the extended community. Direct stakeholders, in this case the students, are the ones who are directly impacted. Indirect stakeholders are the ones who impose the intervention including teachers, administration, or parents. Members of the immediate community would include anyone not directly involved with

implementing PBIS such as anyone in the school, not in an educational role. Members of the extended community live in the school district, but do not interact with the students such as the school board, law enforcement, or business owners (Marchant et al., 2012).

Lane et al. (2009) conducted a study on primary behavioral prevention plans in elementary, middle, and high schools. The results were replicated across grade levels, showing a positive relationship between social validity and treatment integrity. “Student and teachers perceptions of PBIS affect its acceptability, effectiveness, and overall use” (Frey et al., 2010; Kok, 2014). There are very few research studies that exist to find teacher and staff perceptions about PBIS, however, they have been able to identify strengths as well as areas of deficit (Bambara, Gomez, Koger, Lohrmann-O’Rourke, & Xin; 2001; Frey et al., 2010; Kok, 2014; Tillery et al., 2010).

Perceptions of PBIS

Change often results in disruption in our mindset, so resistance is not only natural and to be expected (Noell & Gansle, 2009). Although changes can be difficult, staff members are always more motivated to change whenever they feel there is a need (Adelman & Taylor, 2007). Coffey and Horner (2012) stated that there is no time to play with ineffective behavioral strategies without having substantial proof, however, PBIS is shown to produce positive behavioral results with students, even students from diverse backgrounds (McKinney, Bartholomew, & Gray, 2010; Tobin & Vincent, 2011). Too often, veteran teachers in the educational system, have watched as different programs have been endorsed, only to have something new implemented the following year. Teachers become frustrated with ever-changing reforms and eventually become skeptical of their implementation and sustainability (Datnow, 2005). As Adelman and Taylor (2007) shared, we too often get wrapped up on the procedure of

implementing a new innovation, however, we don't take into consideration the readiness and support from school staff, which has a crucial impact on its sustainability.

Many teachers are reported to have the mentality that teaching social skills is not their job and students should already come with the knowledge of appropriate behaviors. In one study conducted by Flannery, Sugai, and Anderson (2009), several teachers reported that some teachers did not feel that students should be rewarded for "doing the right thing; they should just do it". Another statement from a study found that some teachers did not believe that positive reinforcement worked (Maag, 2001). Similarly, Maag (2001) stated, "Positive reinforcement is often misunderstood because it is rarely associated with discipline". Instead, many teachers and parents wrongly assume the terms "discipline" and "punishment" are synonymous"; if a consequence was not effective at increasing a desired behavior, then it was not a reinforcer. Adult attention is a very powerful reinforcer, even if it is negative, because it is a source of attention for students who so desperately long for it.

PBIS has been studied in various areas, but the juvenile justice system has not been observed extensively. In a study by Houchins et al. (2005), teachers were struggling to implement the framework to fidelity and were still sorting out the notion that PBIS could improve students' academics. One teacher commented, "It does take teachers somewhat away from traditional classroom activities. It focuses on relationship development but there is an academic tradeoff here".

Pas et al. (2015) found that a much higher percentage of younger children were receiving positive behavior interventions as compared with older elementary students. They believed that this discrepancy was due to a developmental expectation that early elementary grade teachers would help to address behavior readiness, allowing them to devote more time to positive

supports. In line with similar results, PBIS teams have reported challenges with differing philosophies such as “old values and attitudes” about discipline, thoughts about the ability to sustain the initiative, staff stress from never-ending mandates, and lack of professional development (Flannery et al., 2009). Luckily, these attitudes are not the majority, as there is a plethora of research to support using positive behavior interventions.

Fallon et al. (2012) agreed with past research, and reported that interventions would be implemented with higher rates of fidelity, thus producing more effective outcomes if stakeholders felt that the intervention was socially valid. Results also showed that teachers who had a more favorable perception of the school, had rated this framework higher and exhibited higher scores (Pas et al., 2015). Reform models that are sustained are those that help educators with demands or did not conflict with current practices (Datnow, 2005). Most participants suggested that SWPBS (Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support) practices were “acceptable, feasible, and potentially efficacious for improving behavior of all students and professional development opportunities were accessible”. Although they rated the relevance, feasibility, and availability favorably, the average rating of their overall scores rated it less efficacious for the ability to improve the behavior of all students (Fallon et al., 2012). Based on this study, personnel would most likely be in favor of the implementation of culturally and contextually appropriate practices in SWPBS settings. Respondents to this survey suggested that SWPBS practices were “acceptable, feasible, efficacious, and moderately accessible” (Fallon et al., 2012).

Current studies in an early elementary setting were very supportive of the PBIS framework, administrative support, and the goals that were set for their school. However, teacher expressed concerns between what they felt they did to increase positive behaviors and

what an observer found they were actually doing (Kok, 2014). Tillery et al. (2010) found that teachers tended to report on individual student behavior rather than the overall school behavior. Bambara et al. (2001) talked with teachers about their experiences and found that teachers valued the support for the PBIS team and the relationships that were developed. Congruent with past research, Kok (2014) found that teacher perceptions were positive and they supported the implementation of the PBIS framework (Frey et al., 2010; Tillery et al., 2010).

Although adult's perception of the effectiveness of PBIS is important, Fisher (2010) reported that it is equally as important to poll both adults and children when implementing frameworks such as PBIS. Middle school students stated that they felt that their teachers should have high morale, involve them in the school mission, have high expectations, and involve them in the planning process (Cortese, 2008).

Fallon et al. (2012) agreed with past research, reporting that when stakeholders feel that an intervention is socially valid, then interventions are implemented with higher rates of fidelity, thus producing more effective outcomes. Results also showed that teachers who had a more favorable perception of the school, had rated this framework higher and exhibited higher scores (Pas et al., 2015). Most participants suggested that SWPBS (Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support) practices were adequate, practical, and showed potential to improve all student behavior and they felt as though they had access to beneficial professional development. Although they rated the relevance, feasibility, and availability favorably, the average rating of their overall scores rated it less efficacious for the ability to improve the behavior of all students (Fallon et al., 2012). Based on this study, personnel would most likely be in favor of the implementation of culturally and contextually appropriate practices in SWPBS settings.

A study conducted by Daunic, Smith, Brank, and Penfield (2006) had teachers to volunteer to teach cognitive-behavioral activities. Their results showed that students' problem solving knowledge had increased, ratings of reactive and proactive aggression had improved, and improvements in their knowledge and behavior were maintained for several months. They did not find that the treatment affected self-control or anger disposition or expression. Teacher responses were positive about the ease of use and value to students. They also expressed a desire to teach these interventions in the future and would recommend it to other staff members.

Tillery et al. (2010) conducted a qualitative study with kindergarten and first grade general education teachers to gain some insight into their perceptions of behavior and effective interventions. Teachers in this study had not had any training on RtI or PBIS, however, some of their ideas coincided with the framework. The participants often discussed individual student behavior, however, they did discuss more proactive interventions and the benefit of setting behavior standards at the beginning of the year. They discussed how punitive reactions can often cause more misbehavior, but how beneficial being more personable with students and discussing what they are doing and giving immediate feedback can be.

Rewards

In terms of reinforcements, Swain-Bradway et al. (2013) found that positive reinforcements for adults were as effective and necessary as the reinforcements for students. On-going support for teachers in their daily practices were reported in 10 out of 10 interviews. This support came in the form of mentoring, training, and administrative support. What we expect the staff to do with our kids-we are certainly going (as administrators) to do with our staff' and "when the kids earn stars, staff write their name on the back and we pick them from a hat and then the staff gets like a gift card, so little things like that that we do for the staff really do help"

(Swain-Bradway et al., 2013). One team leader from this study reported that positively supporting staff for rewarding students was “self-reinforcing”.

77% of college students reported that extrinsic reinforcements helped motivate them to learn during high school (Kok, 2014). Rewards from teachers played a bigger role in motivation than rewards from parents, most likely because of the amount of time that students spend with educators (Davis et al., 2006). Positive reinforcements such as tickets and behavior contracts instead of punishments have been found to be more empirically validated than many other punitive, immediate, punishments (Maag, 2001). According to Maag (2001), although some of the more punitive approaches make help make the school safer because they are removing students who are unsafe, they do not encourage student do attempt to show a more appropriate behavior.

Facilitators

School personnel are the frontline of implementation of SWPBS, so understanding their perceptions of the effectiveness is vital to sustaining practice (Bambara, Nonnemacher, & Kern, 2009). In a research study conducted by McIntosh et al. (2014), results indicated that administrator support and school team functioning were the most significant feature for implementation and sustainability. The top facilitators in the Kincaid, Childs, Blase, and Wallace (2007) study were district-wide support, support for implementing SWPBIS, use of data, professional development training days, and communication between stakeholders. Five facilitating themes emerged from the Swain-Bradway et al. (2013) study including: (1) evidence based-instructional practices, (2) active support of teachers and staff members, (3) positive response to youth behavior, (4) prioritized data, and (5) multi-tiered organization of responses to youth problem behavior. McIntosh, Horner, et al. (2008) researched and proposed a model of

sustainability, which included four hypothesized factors that contribute to sustainability: priority, effectiveness, efficiency, and continuous regeneration.

Priority is the perceived importance of the program as compared to other programs (McIntosh, Horner et al., 2008). In a sea of competing initiatives, placing priority on PBIS ensures that educators will participate in the implementation of this initiative and no other programs. Staff buy-in is pivotal in ensuring the sustainability of PBIS; by integrating this into the staff culture, teachers feel as though this doesn't belong solely to administration (McIntosh, et al., 2013). When the staff members at a school feel as though they have ownership in the implementation of the PBIS process, and students observe teacher and administrative commitment to the framework, students are also more motivated to participate in a change in behavior patterns (Safran & Oswald, 2003). 80% of school personnel is the minimum amount of buy-in to support successful implementation of PBIS (McIntosh et al., 2013; Sugai, Horner, & Lewis-Palmer, 2001). While teacher support is crucial, administrator support for implementation is the number one predictor that an investment will be supported (Kincaid et al., 2007; McIntosh et al., 2013).

For teachers who have difficulty transitioning or accepting new programs, it is important to integrate new initiatives into existing efforts that are already valued, have high priority for implementation, have empirical support and valued outcomes, and the framework will be more likely to sustain (Adelman & Taylor, 2003). Knowing that administrators are supportive, staff can rest assured that there will be dedicated funding to support its implementation and sustainability. This removes the "project mentality" that funding will be removed and the practice will only work short-term.

Effectiveness is the quality of practice and implementation. When practices are implemented to fidelity, stakeholders will be more likely to experience positive student outcomes, which increases motivation (McIntosh, 2013). A team approach is increasingly likely to show improved outcomes and increase fidelity of the program. This team should represent a variety of stakeholders which increase perspective and help to maintain morale.

Efficiency is the resources that are necessary to effectively implement a practice. Increasingly efficient practices appear to be more worthwhile to teachers, which will in turn make them more sustainable. Schools have been shown to be able to have a big impact on behavior with minimal training or help from external resources (Lewis & Sugai, 1999). If teachers feel as though a practice has realistic demands, they are more likely to work it to fidelity. Horner et al. (2005), stressed the importance of social validity when dealing with frameworks and ideas such as PBIS by discussing the correlation between interventionists and their beliefs about how acceptable, feasible, and effective behavior interventions are.

“Continuous regeneration can be seen as ongoing data-drive adaptation of the practice to improve contextual fit within a changing context” (McIntosh, Horner, et al., 2008). This includes collecting fidelity and outcomes regularly and then using this to make practices more effective and efficient, and helping others to adapt their practices (McIntosh et al., 2013). There is strong support for PBIS teams to use data to make decisions regarding the framework (McIntosh et al., 2013; Safran & Oswald, 2003). Swain-Bradway et al. (2013) reported that eight out of ten interviews shared that prioritizing data practices was a facilitator to effective implementation and sustainability. Administrators prioritized meeting once per month to share “a wealth of information across multiple domains” such as academic, social, mental health, and risk ratings. By using office discipline referrals as baseline data, Lewis-Palmer et al. (1999)

discovered how improving teacher's access to information helped to address school wide discipline and safety concerns in an elementary school (Safran & Oswald, 2003).

As with any initiative, it is important that stakeholders stay informed and on top of their practice. Ongoing access to professional development, including external coaching and resources, helps to enhance a program's chances of sustaining the times. Continuous opportunities to access information ensures school-level expertise is developed, which allows schools to develop much bigger common goals. This gives everyone chances to be a leader and make connections beyond the school walls.

Barriers

Omnipresent barriers such as competing initiatives, staff turnover, or lack of resources will always exist in any school setting. Although they are important to note, McIntosh et al. (2014) found that they were rated relatively less important than facilitators. In this study, the most important barrier was inadequate resources. A yearlong research study conducted by Kincaid et al. (2007), investigated school personnel's opinions of the barriers that inhibited the successful implementation of SWPBS and the facilitators that helped to overcome those obstacles. They found that "staff buy-in, data, inconsistency, and reward systems" were the largest barriers to successful implementation.

Lohrmann, Forman, Martin, and Palmieri (2008) conducted a recent study to document provider's observations and experiences about what influenced school personnel's resistance to the implementation of SWPBS. They found that regardless who the participant was, they all experienced some sort of resistance while trying to implement behavior strategies universally. When the resistance was insurmountable, the implementation struggled and the

framework was never implemented. In this case, the participants would try to approach the situation, much as you would a child who was receiving tertiary supports, and tried to figure the function of their resistance. The staff members often felt that without the support of their administrator that the implementation would never move past technical support. They also felt it necessary to periodically check-in with administration to get a status update as well as some feedback and communicate about upcoming events.

A second barrier in the Lohrmann et al. (2008) study was that the staff was skeptical about the necessity of a universal behavior intervention. Some schools were satisfied with their climate and didn't feel as if they needed to take on another initiative. Many participants observed the stress on improving academic achievement in many underachieving schools and found that behavior interventions did not have the priority on them that academics did. There were also participants who did not see the connection between academic achievement and problem behavior.

The Lohrmann et al. (2008) study found that there was a feeling of hopelessness among staff members. Participants in this study described resistant coworkers as being jaded because their perception was that new initiatives were ineffective. Results also showed that there was resistance to implementing the framework, even though it contradicts research by Skinner (1974), and wanted to emphasize punitive responses because they felt they were effective and a logical response. Staff also felt that staff shouldn't have to change in order to get students to display desired behaviors. They did not find it necessary to provide any extrinsic motivation because their perception was that students should all be naturally intrinsically motivated in order to be successful. Lastly, the staff felt disenfranchised both from administrator and other staff members, causing the implementation of a new SWPBS initiative to flounder. When the staff

members at a school feel as though they have ownership in the implementation of the PBIS process, and students observe teacher and administrative commitment to the framework, children are more motivated to participate in a change in behavior patterns (Safran & Oswald, 2003).

Overall, PBIS has shown overwhelmingly positive results for both academic and behavioral growth. Although some stakeholders have had reservations about implementing another initiative, everyone has been in favor of using PBIS as an intervention strategy. This holds true, no matter what the environment. Research has shown that regardless of the outcome, getting stakeholders on board and sharing team data with them regularly is vital to the sustainability of the process.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this research study was to delve into qualitative data to further the knowledge of the phenomenon of elementary school teacher perceptions of using Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports as behavior interventions within one rural Pre-K-5 elementary school in Northwestern North Carolina. By collecting data through individual teacher interviews, this research examines Pre-K-5 elementary school teachers' perspectives of positive behavior interventions effects. This data will be triangulated by looking for common responses that appear multiple times throughout the qualitative process that elaborate on their use of the PBIS framework and which interventions are most commonly utilized. This study aims to describe elementary school teacher perceptions of positive behavior interventions not only as intervention strategies, but the specific behavioral interventions that they have found to be the most effective in their classrooms.

Research Questions

The central research question in this phenomenological study is "What are Pre-K-5 elementary school teachers' perceptions of using PBIS as behavior interventions?" This study strives to intensify the knowledge of the phenomenon, so the researcher also explored answers to the questions listed in Table 1:

Table 1

Research Questions and Data Collection Methods

Research Question	Interview
1. What are elementary school teacher perceptions regarding the use of PBIS as behavioral interventions?	X
2. What elements of PBIS do teachers most often utilize?	X

By using qualitative methodology in education research, the researcher was able to develop interview questions that would get participants to share narratives of their personal experiences regarding PBIS that might otherwise go unsaid. Qualitative data were derived through inductive inquiry in this phenomenological study. Conducting in-depth interviews allowed the researcher to be able to generate a thick description of personal experience that is vital to phenomenological research (Patton, 2015). The researcher used purposeful sampling to select teachers to obtain qualitative data. This allowed them to dig further into the phenomenon underlying the study, helping to give the researcher a more accurate depiction of the participants' experiences. The humanistic principle behind conducting qualitative research emphasizes personal connections to find the story behind a subject's response, thus challenging the researcher to focus their attention to personal rather than procedural data (Patton, 2015). This study was focused on the phenomenon of perceived teacher experiences in real-life classrooms, and sought to find the most utilized element of PBIS. This methodology was the best fit for the researcher because they were seeking to understand the story behind the statistics about PBIS.

Phenomenology

As Patton (1990) stated, “there is essence to shared experiences” (p. 71). Examining these ideas and experiences that teachers share towards using positive behavior interventions in attempts to increase desired behaviors fits well with the phenomenological qualitative tradition (Moustakas, 1994). “Phenomenological studies investigate what was experienced, how it was experienced, and, finally, the meaning that the interviewees assign to the experience” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014, p.382). By applying phenomenological interviews, the researcher is able to gain multiple meanings of the experience (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014) through the lens of the people who have actually experienced it (Mapp, 2008). Patton (2015) stated that phenomenological research aims to describe “how people experience some phenomenon” (p.115). Using phenomenology, the researcher is able to conduct in-depth interviews to evoke more valid data by developing a connection with the study participants by establishing trust, being genuine, keeping eye contact while talking, and using a comfortable voice tone (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014, p.383). These interviews help the researcher to gather more in depth information to understand why teachers’ perceive PBIS to be effective or not, but also the challenges, and effective interventions.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher serves as the gatekeeper to “limit conditions of entry, by defining the problem area of study, by limiting access to data and respondents, by restricting the scope of analysis, and by retaining prerogatives with respect to publication” (Broadhead, 1976, p. 325).

When conducting qualitative studies, Creswell (2014) and McMillan & Schumacher (2014) call for the researcher to be the actual instrument of data collection as they analyze the data through qualitative coding to derive an “essence of experience” (McMillan & Schumacher,

2014; Patton, 2015). The qualitative tradition calls for the interactions between researcher and interviewee to be personal so that they can share in their experiences. Real world experiences and perspectives are documented in their own contexts in qualitative inquiry (Patton, 2015).

For the purpose of this study, the researcher aims to report the record of teachers' perceptions in regards to using the PBIS framework to increase positive behaviors. The researcher in this study serves as the Professional School Counselor in this current school and has previously developed strong rapport with students and staff. Although this information would be beneficial in making participants feel more comfortable during interviews, there is a threat to validity because the researcher also serves as the Co-Coach of the PBIS team and is responsible for providing a lot of the tier II and III interventions. The researcher's relationship and experiences in working with teachers in the same school allows for a richer understanding of the challenges of working with students with intense behavior issues. However, this relationship and inside knowledge can also create biases for the qualitative researcher. For this reason, the researcher arranged to use a proxy interviewer. As Creswell (2014) suggested, the interviewer needs to be someone who the teachers were comfortable with, but would not create a power imbalance between the participant and the interviewer. The researcher chose the Curriculum Specialist because teachers are accustomed to meeting with her weekly and have already established a positive relationship with her.

As humans, we generate opinions based on our past experiences, which can cause biases in qualitative studies. Biases are often built-in to every study and manifests from flawed research because of researcher's' personal opinions and preferences (Mehra, 2002). For this reason, even while using a proxy interviewer, it is important to conduct participant and peer reviews to enhance reflexivity, "rigorous examination of one's personal and theoretical

commitments to see how they serve as resources for selecting qualitative approach, framing the research problem, generating particular data, relating to participants, and developing specific interpretations” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014, p.356). Participants were asked to verify their answers, while a group of peers made up of the dissertation committee helped to check over the raw data. This helps to ensure that the research findings are actually highlighting the phenomenon and it is not just the perception of the researcher (Creswell, 2014).

Ethical Considerations

After deciding on a topic and exploring past research on the topic of positive behavior interventions, the researcher applied and received IRB approval to conduct a study on the perceptions of elementary school teachers in regards to using the PBIS framework to address behavior issues. The researcher also obtained permission from school and county administration to conduct individual interviews for the purpose of collecting data this study. Participation in this study was entirely voluntary and participants were given a copy of an informed consent agreement prior to participating. Participants were treated with caring and fairness and their identities were kept confidential to ensure safety for participants to share their experiences as they apply to the phenomenon (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). Individual participant interviews were audio recorded and transcribed, then hard copies of the interviews were distributed to their owner to be member checked. Participants were allowed to amend or withhold any information from their previously recorded responses.

Setting

As suggested by Creswell (2014) and McMillan and Schumacher (2014), interviews were conducted at convenient times, which were scheduled by the participants. In-depth individual interviews were conducted in one familiar and private location in the study site, which allowed

participants to openly discuss their perceptions of using positive behavior interventions and supports as behavior interventions. Individually, the participants were asked a series of open-ended questions which helped to generate detailed conversations, giving insight to their experiences from working with children with behavior issues requiring additional support.

The student body in this elementary school is made up of roughly 475 students in grades Pre-K-5. Per research from Sugai and Horner (2002), a breakdown of students should show 80% of students who are able to demonstrate desired behaviors, while the remaining 20% of students will require additional social skills, moving them into Tier II or III in the PBIS framework. This elementary school has been implementing PBIS as a behavioral intervention for the past 4 consecutive years prior to the study.

Population

The population of this research study consisted all the Pre-K-5 teachers in this school. An email was sent to the faculty, inviting anyone who is currently or have previously have worked with students who have been in Tier II or III of the PBIS framework, requiring more intensive behavior interventions. From the population, a criterion sample of 12 teachers attended the informational meeting.

Sampling Strategy

For this study, it was important to use purposeful sampling in order to find the group who could give the most productive answers to the research question (Marshall, 1996). Since the researcher is looking to find how effective PBIS is as a behavior intervention, it was imperative that the researcher locate educators who are actually implementing the framework and have experience with students who have required additional instruction. Educational research typically uses large numbers, but as Patton (2009) and Simons (2009) discuss, a researcher is

able to gain much more in-depth information by using smaller number of participants. McMillan and Schumacher (2014) report that the research problem in a phenomenological study is focused on finding the meaning of a phenomenon and this data is collected by conducting intimate and semi-structured interviews.

Criterion sampling method was used to locate participants for the study who currently have a student who is receiving intense behavior interventions or did during the previous school year. For this study, the researcher wanted to find subjects who have experience with dealing with difficult behavior issues but have also made personal attempts to manage these and have sought help from the PBIS team to help diminish negative behavior.

Sample

This phenomenological study represents a collection of qualitative data through multiple sources in one Pre-K-5 elementary school in rural, northwestern North Carolina. This data were obtained by utilizing a proxy interviewer to conduct individual face-to-face interviews from teachers in this elementary school who have experience in dealing with students who are in tier II or III of the PBIS framework and have undergone intensive behavior interventions. As with any phenomenological study, the purpose is to describe teachers' perceptions of using PBIS as a behavioral intervention. The sample population was selected based upon Patton's (2015) ideas of selecting a homogenous group when you are looking for a specific type of person or place which helps give insight into the phenomenon. Although a sample size of 11 teachers may seem very small compared to population samples of many other studies, McMillan and Schumacher (2014) report that the sample size is "related to the purpose, the research problem, the major data collection strategy, and the availability of information-rich cases" (p. 52).

Data Collection Procedures

The researcher aimed to strengthen the credibility in this study by collecting data in a variety of ways. Triangulating (Creswell & Miller, 2000) data from multiple collection sources helps to accomplish this by ensuring that the researcher is not simply running off their own perceptions, observations, or beliefs. Data was triangulated by allowing participants to member check their responses and observing as common themes emerged at least 3 times throughout the course of the research study. The researcher instructed the proxy interviewer to conduct individual and group interviews in natural settings (Creswell, 2014; McMillan & Schumacher, 2014) to gain insight into the phenomenon of using PBIS as a behavior intervention to attempt to identify major themes that run throughout the data (Creswell, 2014; McMillan & Schumacher, 2014; Patton, 2015). By recording interviews and taking notes, this also allowed the interviewer to share information with the participants for verification, but also so they can share with other members to relieve any bias.

Data collection will take place during the first 9 weeks to allow teachers time to come back from summer break, learn their children, and settle in for the new 2017-2018 school year. The teachers who voluntarily participated in these individual interviews which were conducted using a semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix). The structure of the interview helped teachers to describe their perceptions of using positive behavioral interventions in their classrooms while giving them the freedom to divulge into their experiences of using the framework. The study participants elaborated on how they perceive using PBIS to decrease negative behavior, changes they have noticed in their classroom and school climate, and student academics as a result of using PBIS. Participating teachers shared how they implement PBIS, what changes they have noticed because of implementing Tier II and III interventions, as well as

what interventions have been the most successful in their classroom. Teachers summed up their face-to-face interview by giving advice to teachers who are struggling to support students who are displaying negative behavior.

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Shenton (2004) described the notion of “overlapping methods”, which encourages the researcher to use multiple methods of data collection to help to strengthen the dependability of the study. Each participant who was invited to join from the criterion sampling method, was allowed to volunteer. Each participant was ensured of confidentiality so that participants felt safe to share information in confidence, which also gave trustworthiness to the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014; Shenton, 2004).

Data Analysis

When collecting data for qualitative design, the process is very fluid. The researcher has the ability to modify interview questions, collection methods, and people or places that are being studied (Creswell, 2014). After the proxy interviewer conducts the individual interviews with the appropriate teachers, the audio tapes will then be transcribed and coded into “clusters of meaning” (Creswell, 2013, p. 77). By organizing the data in this manner, the researcher allows different themes of the phenomenon of teachers’ perceptions to emerge (Creswell, 2008). Patton (2015) refers to a step in this phenomenological research called “bracketing” where the researcher is able to hone in on the overall sense of the phenomenon based on the individual experiences of the participants. Their perspectives help to describe this underlying phenomenon in the research (Creswell, 2012).

These individual interviews, although fluid, will be semi-structured as the proxy interviewer will be given a script of basic research questions, however, those may be modified given the responses of the participant (Creswell, 2014). Per suggestions of McMillan & Schmacher (2014), these interviews will last approximately 30 minutes to an hour. Data for this phenomenological study will come solely from individual, in-depth interviews.

A qualitative researcher’s role is to analyze the data through qualitative coding to derive an “essence of experience” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014; Patton, 2015). The coding process began in October 2017 as soon as individual interviews had been completed and transcribed. The transcriptions were completed by the proxy interviewer. Any audio recordings along with any identifiable information were retained by the proxy interviewer until the completion of the study. Any directly identifiable information that was reported by study participants was omitted from the transcriptions to keep identity confidential. The in-depth individual interviews

provided the rich qualitative data that was necessary in finding the underlying phenomenon of teacher perceptions toward using positive behavior interventions and support as behavioral interventions.

The coding process for this study occurred in multitude of steps. The initial coding phase ensued as the primary investigator read through the transcribed participant responses. While reading through the data, the primary investigator highlighted ideas and took notes regarding the teachers' responses. The primary investigator sought first to understand the individual participant's meaning, then read again to draw broad connections between the responses. Next, the researcher took all of the participant's responses and organized them by question number as to better compare each individual response to each corresponding question. The primary investigator again read through the responses to each question, highlighting words that appeared multiple times. These words were then labeled as either being "positive" or "negative" responses for each question and organized into columns. By utilizing constant comparative analysis, emergent themes appeared through the coding process. Finally, these themes were taken and reduced into more specific themes and aligned with teacher responses for support. These codes were then categorized to reflect the true underlying phenomenon about teacher perceptions of using positive behavior interventions and support as behavioral interventions. The conclusion of this data analysis took place as the primary investigator interpreted the results of the qualitative data to find the relationship between the emergent themes and the overarching research questions in this study.

Measures of Rigor

Data in this study was triangulated by collecting information from a multitude of sources which helped to increase the trustworthiness of the study. The researcher implored member

checks to ensure that the interviewer understood what the subject was trying to convey to attempt to alleviate forms of bias and inflate credibility, accuracy, and validity of the study (Creswell, 2014; McMillan & Schumacher, 2014; Patton, 2015; Shenton, 2004). Due to the fact that the researcher serves as a Co-Coach of the PBIS team at the present school, it was deemed necessary to exercise the use of a proxy interview to deter any issues during the teacher interviews (Creswell, 2014). Peer debriefers, made up of members of the dissertation committee, allowed the researcher to remain conscious of how personal experiences with the PBIS framework and personal relationships with colleagues could affect the way that data was interpreted (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2015). The study is given transferability by clearly defining the research methods, explaining the role of the researcher, describing sampling methods and collecting and analyzing the data (Shenton, 2004). Following the suggestions of McMillan and Schumacher (2014), the researcher identified trustworthy themes and categories that emerged based on the different experiences with the phenomenon of using PBIS as a positive behavior intervention using inductive and constant comparative analysis.

Although a wealth of knowledge is derived from individual interviews and focus group discussions, it is also important to support these perspectives with artifacts on teacher perceptions, given the phenomenological nature of this study. The audio tapes and notes taken from these interviews were taken and written as a collective narrative to help support teachers' opinions that help create an "essence of experience" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). As a means of qualitative reduction, the data was coded numerous times as general themes became obvious and narrowed down into more specific categories to make the information more meaningful (Patton, 2015). The qualitative researcher's objective is to familiarize themselves

with the data so that they are able to identify themes that emerge from the triangulation the interview data so that they are able to explain the underlying phenomenon.

Summary

This qualitative study applied the phenomenological framework to examine teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of using PBIS as behavioral interventions in one rural Pre-K-5 elementary school. The purpose of this study was to gain data from multiple sources in order to write an essence of experience to depict the overall phenomenon of teacher beliefs regarding PBIS, which parallels the objectives of phenomenological studies. While it would be enlightening to study "if" PBIS is effective using quantitative measures, the researcher felt that more could be learned by studying why or why not the teachers believe the framework is effective. This information is important because it is essential to sustaining educational reform. By using qualitative data such as individual face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions, light can be shed on the phenomenon of experiences from using PBIS to increase desired behaviors.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Introduction

The purpose of this research study was to explore the phenomenon of elementary school teacher perceptions of using positive behavior interventions and support as behavior interventions in one Pre-K-5 school in rural Northwestern North Carolina. Patton (2002) indicates that this type of study helps to capture how an individual experiences a phenomenon as “how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others” (p. 104). The essential question of the study, “What are teachers’ perceptions of using positive behavior interventions and support as behavior interventions?” was supported by the overarching research questions, “What are elementary school teacher perceptions regarding the use of PBIS as behavioral interventions?” and “What elements of PBIS do teachers most often utilize?” The responses to these questions help to inform the researcher of the underlying phenomenon in this qualitative study.

In attempts to strengthen the credibility of this phenomenological study, data analysis included individual, in-depth interviews, the review of proxy interviewer notes, and member checks. This information was coded into categories allowing different themes to emerge. Each individual interview was audio recorded and then transcribed to allow participants to member check their own statements. This helped to ensure accuracy of the data as well as strengthening the credibility of the study. To accurately conduct qualitative data analysis, the researcher is required to analyze and interpret the data to identify themes and clusters of meaning, which helps the underlying phenomenon to emerge from experiences (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015). Constant comparative analysis was used throughout the data collection process to allow the

researcher to identify trustworthy themes that help to explain the participants' experience with the phenomenon (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014).

Prior to beginning the study permission was granted by the ETSU Institutional Review Board. Each participant sat through an information session regarding the background and process of the study where all questions were answered. Voluntary study participants were given a copy of the informed consent document. All information about the research participants was collected by the Proxy Interviewer and a pseudonym was assigned before information was returned to the Primary Investigator. Teachers are identified as Teacher A, Teacher B, Teacher C, Teacher D, Teacher E, Teacher F, Teacher G, Teacher H, Teacher I, Teacher J, and Teacher K.

Data Collection

The data collection process of this study took place in the individual participant interviews that were conducted in September 2017. The interview protocol for these interviews may be reviewed in the Appendix . All individual interviews were conducted by the Proxy Interviewer, who audio recorded, and transcribed the data before returning to the Primary Interviewer. Notes indicating the teacher's pseudonym and aligning it with their experience in the classroom as well as with the PBIS framework, grade level taught, and degrees and certifications were collected by the Proxy Interviewer. Transcriptions of interviews and notes giving information about teacher backgrounds were reviewed for emergent categories and themes.

Participants

The participants for this study were chosen from the entire population of one public Pre-K-5 elementary school who indicated that they were either currently implementing Tier II or Tier III behavior interventions, or had in the previous school year. All certified teachers at the school received an email about an information session on the research study. Any teacher with experience implementing Tier II or Tier III interventions was invited to attend. After teachers were given information about the study and the primary researcher answered any questions, teachers were asked to voluntarily participate. A group of 12 total female participants originally volunteered for the study, however, 11 participated to the completion of the study. The volunteer from the original group was unable to participate due to being on medical leave. All participants in this study are female educators who currently teach in grades kindergarten through third grade. Teachers' years of experience ranged from 4 years to 22 years with an average of 9.5 years. There were 3 teachers that had 4 to 6 years, 5 teachers had 9 to 11 years, 2 teachers had 12 to 15 years, and one teacher had 20 to 25 years of experience. Reference Table 2 for a full listing of research participants and their background.

The PBIS framework was adopted at the current school 5 years ago during the 2013-2014 school year. Since that time, 8 of 11 participants have been employed as certified teaching staff and have received annual training and progress updates since the implementation year. One participant has 3 years of experience implementing PBIS due to being employed at a non-PBIS school. Two other participants only have one year of experience with PBIS at the current school, but have at least 4 total years of PBIS experience at other schools in the district.

Table 2

Participant Overview

Teacher Pseudonym	Degree Held	Years of Experience	Years of PBIS @ Current School	PBIS Representative	National Board Certification
Teacher A	BS, MA	9	5		
Teacher B	BS	4	1	X	
Teacher C	BS	4	3		
Teacher D	BS	9	5	X	
Teacher E	BS	15	1		X
Teacher F	BS	10	5		
Teacher G	BS	5	5	X	
Teacher H	BS, MA	12	5	X	
Teacher I	BS	22	5		X
Teacher J	BS, MA	9	5		
Teacher K	BS	9	5		

Interview Results

Eleven teachers from a population of 23 met research criteria by having a student with whom they are currently or have previously implemented intensive Tier II or Tier III behavior interventions.

Research Question 1

What are your perceptions of using PBIS as a behavioral intervention?

Overall, 10 out of 11 participants reported that using PBIS as a behavioral intervention was effective.

As referenced by Teacher G:

I think it works. I wish they would have had it when I started out as a teacher, using charts and different things and not sticking the same universal programs really made a difference. Now that we have PBIS as a behavior intervention, we see growth from it every year.

Teacher D stated, “I have seen students have a tremendous amount of growth from using it as a behavior intervention”. Although the majority of participants noted that they think it works well for students, there were 4 participants who went on to express some areas of concern about the PBIS framework, such as: 1) “doesn’t prepare students for the real world”, 2) “absence of concrete consequences”, 3) “few outliers that it will not work for”, and 4) “there is a long time between rewards”.

Research Question 2

What are your perceptions regarding using the PBIS framework to decrease negative student behavior?

Ten out of 11 study participants said that the PBIS framework has helped to decrease negative student behavior.

Teacher H stated:

The data that we have proves that PBIS is a good indicator of student behavior. I notice over the years that our data shows that referrals have went down, the matrix points have went down, most kids you don’t even give a matrix point to

because they have corrected their behavior because they want to be better than that.

Although Teacher D indicated that the PBIS framework decreases negative behavior, they also stated, “You have to get the buy-in before the negative behaviors decrease though”.

Teacher K reported, “I don’t think that helps with that very much. What seems to work better is an immediate reaction when they have a negative behavior. A consequence right then seems to work better instead of getting a matrix point and then maybe getting another one a few weeks later. It just seems to be too long between the behavior and the reaction to it.

Research Question 3

How has classroom behavior changed in your classroom since the implementation of school wide PBIS?

Nine out of 11 study participants reported that classroom behavior had improved since the implementation of school wide PBIS.

Teacher F stated:

It has changed greatly. The kids that were always having behavioral problems are able to find ways to turn themselves around”. While the majority of teachers stated that classroom behavior had improved, it is important to note that Teacher A disclosed that “the same kids are still not making rewards.

Teacher E stated that there are challenges to classroom behavior because, “a student can get in trouble and it results in a matrix point, but they still meet their weekly goal”.

Teacher C could not note any observable changes and stated, “I don’t have anything else to compare it to” as she was not employed as a teacher prior to the adoption of the PBIS framework.

Research Question 4

What changes have you noticed in school climate as a result of PBIS?

Eleven out of 11 research participants stated that they have notice a positive change in school climate as a result of PBIS.

Teacher I reported, “I think that we are all more on the same page. Our terms and vocabulary matches, which helps the students. I think they know from Pre-K to 5th grade what is expected and it definitely gets more of a cohesiveness to our school”.

Consistently, Teacher J stated:

There are clearer expectations across the board. We have got the posters everywhere and at the beginning of the every school year every teacher talks about what is expected at every location. I also think it is good for the kids. It is also good for the teachers because they know that the expectations for every classroom are set. There are expectations from everywhere and so there is an across the board language that everyone is using and I think that there is a more positive language for trying to find the good and not just focusing on the negative as much.

Two participants went on to disclose some reservations that they have with utilizing the PBIS framework. Teachers A stated that “it is the same kids that miss rewards”, while Teacher K said, “students don’t seem to care about getting a matrix point”.

Research Question 5

What are your perceptions about the PBIS framework’s effect on academic achievement?

Ten out of 11 study participants stated that the PBIS framework had a positive effect on academic achievement.

Teacher B helped summarize the majority of participants’ statements by saying, “I am a firm believer that if those behaviors are in check your academic growth or achievement, you are going to get better because you could ask your student to do anything of them and as long as their behaviors are in check, they are going to be learning”.

Teacher G elaborated on the subject stating:

If you are out of the room for behavior, you are not in the room learning and so we have seen a decrease in that. If you are upset or angry, you are not going to be doing your best and so by having a program that follows a positive behavioral model, I think you see a lot more success. Kids who do hit a bump in the road or do make a mistake while we are reteaching that, it is not a punishment and a consequence necessarily as, “you know what, let’s go back and look at this again”. I feel like it changes their attitude towards behavior and I think that affects academics. You’re going to work hard and try your best if you feel good about yourself.

Teacher A also stated:

Well I definitely think that you have to have managed behavior before learning is going to take place. So I think it does help little kids with the positive reinforcement especially in the classroom if you have that up and they can see, oh hey, I'm doing a good thing, I just received a point, so I do think that helps.

There were two participants who stated that academics had not increased greatly since the implementation of PBIS. Teacher K reported, "If you have a student who a PBIS intervention works for, then it might help slightly with their academics, but I haven't seen that big of a change".

Teacher C stated:

Unfortunately, not all students are totally responsive to it so you still have classroom behaviors and issues that cause disruption, so you go back and just try to keep focusing on the positive, but I don't know if I can say that academic achievement has greatly increased as a result of PBIS".

Research Question 6

How do you implement PBIS in your classroom?

The responses to this question were consistent across the board. Eleven out of 11 teacher participants mentioned using Class Dojo or tickets to reward positive behavior, as well as working towards a weekly goal.

This is evidenced from Teacher D's statement:

We use Class Dojo and if they get 20 points by the end of the week then they get to participate in a classroom reward that varies from choosing centers to, this week they are getting a special snack. We vote on what classroom rewards we want, and the ones who don't meet their goal participate in reteaching during this time".

Teacher F also mentioned:

We have the class DoJo where we go over it at the beginning of the school year and what it means to be respectful, responsible, safe and happy and then students receive their points as they go. If they have twenty points by the end of the week they are able to get their classroom reward and vote on what they want to do.

You can give them choices on what they are working for.

Teacher C discussed some of the ways she implements PBIS in her classroom by saying:

Mostly by Class DoJo. Kids love to see their little avatar monster and love to watch their points go up. I also give out tickets if I am not at the computer. I also do things like Bucket Points for "Bucket Filling" behaviors, such as saying a kind word or helping another student. My class works toward a whole class goal.

Right now, my class is working toward their small reward. When the bucket is half way full, they will get a small reward and when it is full, they will get a large reward. We try to promote individual positive behavior, but they need to also learn how to work as a team. I want them to see how their individual behaviors can help our whole group.

Research Question 7

What changes have you seen in student behavior as a result of Tier II or Tier III interventions?

Eleven out of 11 teacher participants unanimously stated that they had seen positive changes in student behavior as a result of Tier II or Tier III interventions.

Teacher E reported:

I have a couple of kids that I am kind of doing Tier II with and they have a little system where they are marking after each activity or transition. During each transition time, they're monitoring their behavior throughout that time and at the end of that task they are giving themselves a smiley face if they were productive and they were on task and they didn't have to be refocused and it has made a tremendous impact. Even administration can't believe this kid because he is entirely different from the previous year. I do think that it does make a positive impact on their behavior when they either do CI-CO or they are keeping their behavior monitored and documented on a little chart where they can add a smiley face because they are seeing that, "hey I did have a good day!"

Teacher J also stated:

I know that the CI-CO has been good for kids. It sort of gives them someone to be responsible to other than just the classroom teacher. I also know that doing social stories with them, with the Tier II kids get an opportunity to rethink what they are doing, it also gives them a time to step out if they are spiraling into negativity and it gives them a time to step out and rethink and look at what their

social story is and then come back into the classroom. So, I think it gives those kids and teachers a little more breathing room.

Three out of the 11 participants disclosed that they had concerns over Tier II or Tier III interventions success. Teachers A and C stated that “there are some kids that it doesn’t work for”, while Teacher K stated that “Check-In-Check-Out works some days-it just depends on the kid”.

Research Question 8

What behavioral interventions have you found to be the most successful in your classroom?

Eleven out of 11 participants were able to identify some sort of behavioral intervention that has been found to be successful in their classroom. Four out of 11 teachers stated “Check-In-Check-Out” was the most successful. Three out of 11 teachers named “accountability” or “sticker charts” as the most successful. Another three out of 11 teachers named “student chosen rewards” as the most successful. All teachers named either Check-In-Check Out accountability or sticker charts, or student selected rewards. Behavior charts and student chosen rewards are a part of the Check-In-Check-Out process, but we are unable to determine if these results are one in the same, or not.

Teacher C was able to elaborate on using charts stating:

Accountability charts like a sticker chart seem to work great. If I have a student who has an accountability chart or a sticker chart, they can use that to reflect.

Then at the end of the day, we can look back and say, you struggled, but you did a good job here, here, and here so you’re still going to get your reward today. It

holds them accountable then gives them a way to set a goal for something to work on the next day.

Teacher H disclosed information regarding student chosen rewards saying:

Giving them a chance to earn something that they want to earn. Allowing them to have the chance to pick what they want to earn because I can't just rely on them wanting what I want them to have, it helps to give them a chance to choose.

Letting them be in charge and pick gives them ownership.

Even though Teacher K disclosed successful interventions in her classroom, she disclosed:

Immediate consequence for disruptive behavior and not behaving. For example, if a student doesn't finish work, then they have to finish it while everybody else is doing something fun. I have a clip system, which we move up and down. They get prizes if they get up to the top and that seems to work pretty well to get the prizes.

Research Question 9

What advice would you give teachers who are struggling with negative student behavior?

Eleven out of 11 participants were able to report advice to teachers who are struggling with negative student behavior. Six out of 11 participants discussed the importance of developing a positive relationship with students who are struggling with behavior. Also, four out of 11 participants mentioned the significance of finding something that motivates students.

As evidenced by Teacher G:

Number one, you have gotta find something that motivates them and making a connection, developing a relationship, finding something that is going to encourage them to want to be successful. I am a big believer in that there are some kids who will have a phenomenal day for five minutes of iPad time, and those five minutes of iPad time is worth the fact that I am able to give them solid core math and reading instruction. Sometimes finding something that motivates them, don't hesitate to go to your PBIS team and your team of teachers because chances are, there is someone else who has had a kid like that in their little family before and they have tried and found things that were successful or maybe things that were absolutely an epic fail, which is okay too, but learn from them, use that and put it in your toolbox.

Two out of 11 participants stated the importance of talking with your PBIS team for help, as shown by Teacher A, "I would definitely tell them that they need to talk with the PBIS team, if their DoJo points or tickets are not being effective. You need to be open with the parents, student, and the PBIS team and work together to find a solution".

Emergent Themes

Based on the analysis of data, the following themes emerged from teacher participants' statements which were taken from their individual interviews.

Teacher Perceptions are that PBIS is Effective at Decreasing Negative Student Behavior

In this study, all 11 participants expressed positive feelings about the effectiveness of PBIS at least once during the interview. Unanimously, 11 out of 11 participants stated that PBIS has had a positive impact on negative student behavior throughout the school day. Two

participants stated that they liked using the program while another two stated that they had seen growth come from using the framework.

Importance of Relationships in PBIS

Throughout the course of this study, five participants made explicit reference to the importance of building relationships to ensure the success of the PBIS framework. These relationships may be cultivated between struggling students and their classroom teacher, their Check-In-Check-Out mentor, or anyone in the school building. Students have a need to feel included and can be increasingly motivated when they are held accountable by multiple positive adults. Relationships are reported to have to come first before any true learning, both academic and behavioral, can take place.

This theme as echoed by Teacher H, “Develop a positive relationship somehow, for example, I use morning meeting. I think that builds the climate and that positive relationship. It gives you a chance to learn about them and the things that they like and takes academics out of it. They are learning about their classroom family and they are interested because they learn things about you, just like you learn about them”. Teacher H goes on to say that she implements PBIS in her classroom by using “the 4 Bs, we use the ticket program and DoJo and we try to make a positive culture make kids feel welcome and wanted in our classroom. You hope that they feel that positive relationship between them and you”.

Teacher I also spoke to the theme of relationships, “For the small percentage of students that regular Tier I doesn’t work, I have seen Tier II intervention, such as CI-CO be very helpful. For one student particularly, last year he went from having a really tough time to doing really

well. Another couple of students that used CI-CO, they also showed, not as significant as the other student, but, every student that has been on CI-CO as a Tier II intervention has improved”.

Teacher C presents the importance of relationships by stating:

Try to build a relationship with that child. I had a student last year who was very difficult at the beginning of the year. Once we built a relationship, he wanted to please me. He didn't turn into the perfect child and still struggled, but he did put forth an effort. During reading groups and other activities, he really wanted to please me and he started showing growth in his academics”.

Correspondingly, Teacher A reported:

I think pulling the kids in a one-on-one situation. I think the CI-CO is really good because, especially when students are paired with teachers that they have been successful with, or a previous teacher that has taught them that they have a good relationship with because they know they are going to check in with that person at the end of the day and get an update on how their day went. So I think that's a good thing”.

Consistency in Practice

Many teachers throughout the data collection process referenced the benefits that were gained in the classroom and school community by being consistent in behavioral practices.

Teacher H presents this idea in her statement, “I think kids have more of an idea of what's going on from every class, it's not you're in one grade and you flip cards, the next year you have a clip chart. It's a consistent thing and they know what happens from year to year. They don't have to relearn all those steps”.

This is also evidenced in Teacher D's statement, "I think behavior has improved in the sense that they come from a classroom in the year before having the exact same expectations. We have the exact same mottos. There are adults in our school who follow this to a T, everybody does, and so they know whether they are in the cafeteria, or the gym, or the playground, or my classroom, they are going to hear the exact same dialog with adults and with each other no matter where they are in the school and I think that helps to reinforce it, the consistency of the universal expectation". Having students aware of school wide expectations has been a huge benefit in decreasing negative behaviors and helping to protect class time, as older students are aware of the rules that they have been taught in previous years.

Teacher J stated:

With part of our PBIS, that we had the sort of guidelines for every classroom in what being safe, respectful and responsible looks like, and so there are clearer standards for everybody and I think that makes it more clear cut for the kids and so I think that has changed it, clear guide lines.

The consistency in this framework does not stop at the school doors. It is important that parents have open lines of communication and that they are supportive of the interventions that are being put in place at school. Many teachers also referenced parents helping to support the outcome of students' daily behavior charts when they come home.

This is evidenced by Teacher D when she stated:

For a student who has a lot of support from school and at home and they can make the growth they need to make to decrease the negative behavior. You have to get the buy-in before the negative behaviors decrease though". If a child goes home and a

parent does not support the school's efforts, the charts are likely to have no bearing on a child's day.

Teacher E eluded to what takes place when a child takes home a behavior chart:

Their little smiley face chart has been because they see that they are getting all these smiley faces that they are working towards having a good day and then they take it home and their parents see it, so we praise, and some parents have something they are doing at home with those. I have found that has been effective and just focusing on the positive. The number of Dojos they get each day, they know how many they get, and if they have a bad day, then they can make it up and try to have a better day the next day, so they are all trying to get 20. It makes a big impact and parents are also aware.

Teacher A also spoke to the importance of "being open with parents" as well as the student and PBIS Team to look for solutions to problem behavior.

Student Centered Interventions

Just as it is important to have consistency and support from parents, it is equally as important to get students to buy-in to the framework. This is reflected in a statement by Teacher F:

Being able to let them pick what they are working for at the start of the year because if they are not invested in it completely then it is not going to work in the first place. Just giving them the choices to decide what they are going to earn". As mentioned numerous times throughout this study, behavioral interventions must be more individualized so that students can be successful.

As noted by Teacher B:

Some of your problem students getting a little bit more of that attention or focus in certain areas of the day where they might need a break to go take a walk. I think we can pick up on those cues more, looking at those Tier II, Tier III intervention babies so that we can better help them and figure out the why they are behaving the way they are doing and as teachers or administration be able to help them and to get them to stay in that regular classroom setting so they can be successful". As educators, it is important to know your students and learn their needs. Teacher B stated:

Some of your problem students getting a little bit more of that attention or focus in certain areas of the day where they might need a break to go take a walk. I think we can pick up on those cues more, looking at those Tier II, Tier III intervention babies so that we can better help them and figure out the why they are behaving the way they are doing and as teachers or administration be able to help them and to get them to stay in that regular classroom setting so they can be successful".

Teacher I elaborated on finding specific motivators for students:

I think the CI-CO has been the most successful. They just like having that extra attention from another educator and they look forward that person coming in and seeing them on a daily basis. I think that has been the biggest motivator. I think PBIS works really well as a motivator for most students. Most of my children have been very successful. I think last year most of the time I had 95% that

participated in Fun Friday. Most children enjoyed the Fun Friday rewards and the quarterly rewards from PBIS, so I think it is a good motivator for positive behavior.” Teacher I said her advice in terms of teachers who are dealing with struggling behavior was, “Pray. Just keep on doing what you are doing. Keep on using motivators and positive reinforcement and building a relationship with that child and finding what makes them tick. Don’t give up.

Similarly, Teacher E stated:

Just maybe step back and see what is the reason for this behavior? Is there something in the environment, is there something going on in their home life, something the teacher may be doing different? Just step back and kind of observe and take it in and think about what is taking place”. It is important to try to figure out the function of a child’s behavior in order to try to help remedy it.

Teacher K also echoed these thoughts saying:

You just have to find what works for that child. Find something that that child is really interested in. It might be that you have a student that really likes the computer so you can offer a few minutes on the computer if they finish their work or their behavior improves”.

Perceptions are that PBIS is Not Effective for All Students

As many research studies as there are to support the fact that PBIS is effective for students overall, unfortunately it is an unrealistic claim to say that it has been effective for every student. This theme emerged as four teachers, at one point or another, mentioned that they had students in their classroom for whom this framework was ineffective.

Teacher A reported:

I think it can be effective, but I don't think it prepares kids for the real world. I have seen it work, but it is short term a lot of times. The behavior will be corrected for a short time, but then the behavior will come back. I guess the positive reinforcement, you know, that's why we keep doing that, it kind of keeps it abreast of the negative behavior".

Teacher C said:

I think that the theory of PBIS is a great idea. Focusing on positive behaviors is great, but it is difficult to implement with certain grade levels. Students have a problem with the absence of concrete consequences. The positives are really positive and they can focus on that but they don't quite grasp the complete concept.".

Teacher H stated:

I think it works most of the time. You have your few select students who it will not work for, your outliers, but overall, I think it is a positive reinforcement for students and those students who need the extra with the Check-In-Check-Out, I think it is a positive reinforcement."

Teacher K disclosed, "I don't think it works that well for elementary students. It seem to works better for older students than younger students because it's a long time between times of their reward".

Although teachers indicated that they are striving daily to help students learn appropriate behaviors, some students just have a more difficult time grasping the concept. Teacher C stated, “I have some students that interventions are very positive, productive, and beneficial to them and then I have others that I have tried a variety of things and it doesn’t work. But you just keep going back and trying new things.”

Likewise, Teacher A reported:

I have seen it work, but it is short term a lot of times. The behavior will be corrected for a short time, but then the behavior will come back. I guess the positive reinforcement, you know, that’s why we keep doing that, it kind of keeps it abreast of the negative behavior.

It is important that regardless of how stressful things may seem, teachers keep trying new interventions until they find something that works for students.

As demonstrated by Teacher G:

Again, I think we see students this past year who didn’t receive Matrix points and were able to go on fantastic field trips and experience success where maybe they hadn’t the year previous had any of those experiences. So, clearly it is working and I know it is meant to be the basic Tier I meets the 80%. I do appreciate that it does have a Tier II and a Tier III, just like our RtI Process academically does, and so it fits kids who don’t fit the mold.

Teacher J also demonstrated this idea in saying:

I like how it goes up step by step and adds more interventions in on top of everything. That way if something is not working at the lower level, you can just put more interventions in on top of it, but hopefully by the end all the students will be successful.

PBIS has a Positive Impact on Academics

Nine out of 11 participants attributed an increase in academic achievement to the implementation of PBIS in this elementary school.

These 9 participants' opinions were summarized by Teacher I:

Well, I think it is understood that a child that is behaving and following the rules is probably going to be a better student, so I think that the academically behavioral go together and it is hard to separate, so I think go nicely together.

Teacher H reported:

I think it all goes hand-in-hand. If you're behaving, then kids will be successful in the classroom. Behavior hinders kids from learning and behavior can be a positive influence they work so their behavior can improve as well.

Summary of Data Analysis

In this research study, qualitative data obtained through individual interviews provided rich narratives about teacher perspectives of utilizing positive behavior interventions and support as a behavioral intervention. In order to gain the "essence of experience" which helps to summarize the underlying phenomenon, the qualitative researcher read through the interview transcriptions multiple times. Each time, the primary investigator made notes on member-

checked responses provided by teacher participants. The researcher read transcriptions first to gain an understanding of their perspective; subsequent readings helped the researcher to find commonalities between teachers' responses. The primary researcher then organized all of the responses by question number and picked out words that appeared more than once, interpreting their statements as either positive or negative. By doing so, themes began to emerge from the qualitative data. These broad themes then evolved into more specific themes through qualitative reduction. The primary researcher analyzed and interpreted results for this study which are presented in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to investigate elementary school teacher perceptions of using positive behavior interventions and support as behavior interventions in one Pre-K-5 school in rural Northwestern North Carolina. In Chapter 1, the researcher provided an introduction to the research topic, stated the significance of the study, discussed limitations and delimitations of the study. Chapter 2 contained a review of pertinent literature on the research topic. Chapter 3 described the primary researcher's phenomenological approach to qualitative inquiry as well as research methodology. Chapter 4 presented the results of the individual interviews and emergent themes which were presented at least three times throughout the course of the data collection process. The data derived through qualitative inquiry provided the primary researcher with rich descriptions of teachers perceptions which align with pertinent literature based on the implementation of PBIS in schools. A summary of study findings, conclusions, and recommendations for practice and future research are presented in Chapter 5.

Conclusions

This phenomenological study sought to find a deeper understanding of teacher perceptions regarding using positive behavior interventions and supports as behavior interventions. The qualitative process was guided by the two overarching research questions:

- 1) What are elementary school teacher perceptions regarding the use of PBIS as behavioral interventions?
- 2) What elements of PBIS do teachers most often use?

To attempt to write an “essence of experience” (McMillian & Schumacher, 2014; Patton, 2015) based on the phenomenon of teacher perceptions in regard to using PBIS as a behavioral intervention, the primary interviewer collected data derived from analyzing the transcriptions of face-to-face interviews. The findings and conclusions drawn from this research study may help educators and administrators in the study school to strengthen PBIS practices in their school.

Implications for further research may help to shape PBIS practices in this school, but other elementary schools as well. Information derived from implications for further research from this study could potentially strengthen classroom management education in teacher preparation programs.

Emergent themes appeared throughout the qualitative process more than three times. This information was taken from across the interview questions. Conclusions drawn from emergent themes are presented in this section.

Theme 1: Teacher Perceptions are that PBIS is Effective at Decreasing Negative Student Behavior

Collectively, all 11 teacher participants had something positive to say about using PBIS as a behavioral intervention and the impact that it has made on the school climate. Ten out of 11 participants attributed the decline in negative student behavior in the school and their classrooms to the implementation of the PBIS framework.

The data derived from these interviews clearly show that using PBIS is effective overall, which is demonstrated in research by Tobin and Sugai (2005), which stated that the implementation of the PBIS framework was successful for over 60% of students. Students are

reported to be showing more positive and less negative behaviors in and out of the classroom, which is helping them grow academically, and in turn, helping to grow the school climate.

Theme 2: Importance of Relationships in PBIS

Many educators will agree, before any true learning can take place, a significant relationship must be formed (Bell, 2003). In this study, five teacher participants explicitly discussed the importance of developing a relationship with a child, although, making a connection with students was eluded to numerous times throughout the qualitative process. A lot of teachers placed emphasis on developing a positive relationship with their students before doing anything else. Building relationships with teachers, parents, and other students is the most important social skill that a child can possess (Crowder, 2008; Goleman, 1996). Many teachers mentioned that creating a bond with their students had been positive both for students' behavior as well as their academics. Four teachers spoke to the importance of Check-In-Check-Out as a positive behavioral intervention because it allowed students to develop another relationship with someone besides their classroom teacher, specifically someone they have a positive relationship with or have been successful with (Tobin & Sugai; 2005). Research is supportive of interventions such as Check-In-Check-Out because there is a positive contact with adults. Allowing students some one-on-one time with an adult has proven to be a good motivator for students, according to two teacher participants. This idea was echoed by Klem and Connell (2003) who found that 40-60% of students become disengaged as they progress through grades, but allowing them to have one-on-one attention with positive adults has proven to be effective at keeping them engaged and motivated in education.

The data derived from this study indicated that teachers place a lot of emphasis on developing relationships, specifically someone that child has been successful with. It shows that

students who feel a connection are more willing to work academically and behaviorally. The decreases that we have seen in negative behavior have been linked to these positive relationships that are occurring between a struggling child and another adult in the building.

Theme 3: Consistency in Practice

Teacher participants mentioned having clear-cut and consistent guidelines seven times throughout the course of qualitative inquiry. They stated that these had helped decrease negative student behavior because students had the same expectations in every area of the school building, all throughout the day. In research by Tobin and Sugai (2005) emphasis was placed on the importance of having accurate and consistent implementation of the PBIS framework by all staff members throughout the day. Teacher participants in this study also stated that teachers in upper grades were no longer having to spend as much time teaching behaviors because it was engrained in students by that point. Pas et al. (2015) reported that very few students in the upper grades were receiving support from intensive behavior interventions. Teachers in the study also reported that PBIS has been cohesive for this school because everyone is on the same page and using the same vocabulary with students. Various research studies mentioned that by implementing PBIS practices to a higher rate of fidelity, by teaching consistent routines and open communication between staff and students, then schools would see more positive results.

Three other teachers also mentioned the importance of involving parents in PBIS. Two teachers mentioned communicating with parents so they are aware of student progress and will hopefully follow up at home, while one other teacher mentioned needing buy-in from students and parents. Lewis and Sugai (1999) commented on the importance of keeping open lines of communication and consistent routines and expectations in order for students to show more positive progress.

Seven out of 11 teachers from this research study spoke to the effectiveness of using a CI-CO or behavior chart to help students monitor their behavior. Prior research conducted over a 15 year time period showed countless studies that spoke to the effectiveness of using behavior charts to monitor student success (Davies & McLaughlin, 1989; Fairchild, 1987; Long & Edwards, 1994). Similarly, Nelson et al. (1996) reported that the Devereaux Behavior Rating Scale-School Form helped to show growth on students needing intensive interventions in both behavior and academics.

There is evidence to support the fact that being consistent in practices from grade level to grade level have been beneficial in helping to decrease negative behavior. Being consistent and involving parents in the PBIS framework has also been beneficial in helping to support struggling students. The open lines of communication with parents and getting them on-board to support teachers' efforts has also been effective in increasing positive behavior in this school.

Theme 4: Interventions Should be Individualized

Seven different teachers made mention of individualizing interventions for student because every student is different. Some of the teachers spoke to the fact that some interventions will work for some children, and not others. Some teachers discussed the importance of chunking a student's day differently to help him or her find success. Many teachers stated that you have to find what works for that individual child to motivate them.

As research mentioned intensive behavior interventions must be individualized (cite the research). Based on these research findings, it is apparent that students who do not conform to teacher requests must have some differentiation in their behavioral instruction. Prior research showed that rewards from teachers played a bigger role in motivation than rewards from parents,

most likely because of the amount of time that students spend with educators (Davis et al., 2006). When students get this positive interaction and rewards, it has been found to make more of an impact that some of the more punitive discipline methods (Maag, 2001). By making a reward a personable experience for a child, both in the time of day and what they choose, this can prove to be a huge motivator for them to get through the day.

Theme 5: Teacher Perceptions are that PBIS is Not Effective for All Students

Although there was a large body of evidence supporting the theme that teacher participants had a favorable perception of using PBIS as a behavior intervention, there is also enough evidence to support the fact that teachers do not have a favorable perception of using PBIS as a behavior intervention for all students. Even though they had positive remarks, four teacher participants reported concerns about using PBIS schoolwide. They stated that they did not have the perception that the framework prepared students for the real world, expressed concern over the amount of time between rewards, and stated that the absence of concrete absences made it difficult for certain grade levels to implement. Overall, these teachers reported that there are some students for whom this framework will not work.

Sugai and Horner (2002) stated that 80% of students would be successful receiving Tier I interventions, while 15% would require Tier II, and the remaining 5% would need Tier III interventions. A study by Tobin and Sugai (2005) states that 60% of students are successful with primary interventions, where 35% needed secondary, and another 5% needed tertiary interventions, but time and resources did not allow. The very students who needed interventions were the same ones who were resistant to them. The findings from this study showed that even though teachers had a positive perception, some of these teachers' classrooms do house students who are not being successful with the amount of interventions that are being implemented.

Findings from this study supported the idea that teachers have a positive perception of using positive behavior interventions and support as a behavior intervention when it is implemented consistently and to fidelity (George & Martinez, 2007; Horner, Freeman, Nelson, & Sugai, 2007). However, teachers did not appear to have a positive perception of using positive behavior interventions and support as a behavior intervention because the same students who are reported to not be successful and miss rewards are the very same students who are still struggling with negative behavior. This is evidenced by research findings that state that the majority of behavior problems are attributed to approximately 5-7% of the school population. Teachers had the perception that it is the same students who are rewarded all the time, while the same students are consecutively missing out on rewards. Teachers stated that they felt that “nothing would work for these kids” and that these students “don’t even care if they miss a reward”.

Theme 6: PBIS has a Positive Impact on Academics

Ten out of 11 participants at the study school stated that PBIS made a positive impact on students’ academic achievement. Scott and Barrett (2004) reported that there was less time spent dealing with behaviors leaving more time for direct instruction. This research is echoed in this study by participants who agreed that students were not having to leave the classroom as often, causing them to be absent for instructional time. With an increase in direct instruction, teachers perceive that they are seeing increased academic growth. Various studies such as those conducted by Kelm et al. (2014) as well as Kagan and Kagan (2009) have shown effectiveness for PBIS such as increased on-task time which ultimately lead to an increase academic testing scores.

Recommendations for Further Practice

Based on the findings from this study, the following recommendations have been made for implementing PBIS as a behavioral intervention:

- Examine parental involvement in PBIS and find ways to include them as a stakeholder in implementing PBIS, including open communication and serving as a representative on the PBIS Team.
- Report PBIS data to staff quarterly to demonstrate the positive effects of positive behavior interventions. As teachers see statistics that support their efforts, they are much more likely to implement the framework to fidelity, thus gaining even more positive results.
- Provide basic PBIS Training for everyone in the school building as students develop relationships not only with their classroom teacher, but bus drivers, cafeteria workers, and janitorial staff.
- School coordinated transportation to take teachers on a “field trip” to see first-hand where students come from. Allowing teachers the opportunity to experience a student in their own element can help teachers understand the function of these students’ behavior, making it easier to develop a relationship with them.
- Teachers should be given collaborative time to plan effective behavior interventions. Teachers are often given planning time in order to effectively plan academic interventions, however, in order to teach the whole child, we must teach them behavior as well. This time could allow teachers to find alternative interventions for students who are struggling.

- Increased teacher professional development on intensive behavior interventions and suggestions for those students who PBIS “doesn’t work for”.

Each one of these recommendations for further practice could be easily achieved in this study school as well as at the district level. Teachers can work within their own school building, but can easily extend these practices to the district or region of schools who are similar in makeup.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the results of this phenomenological study, a wealth of knowledge has been derived throughout the qualitative inquiry process, however, there is an abundance of information left to be learned about implementing PBIS. This study was conducted in one rural elementary school in Northwestern North Carolina and cannot be generalized to another location given the qualitative nature.

Although this study was opened up to an entire Pre-K-5 elementary school, the only participants to volunteered and met the criteria of implementing Tier II or Tier III behavioral interventions were females currently teaching in grades kindergarten through 3rd grade. To gain increased knowledge as to how PBIS is implemented in grades 4 and 5, another study must be held to understand why no intensive interventions are being utilized. To gain insight into the true phenomenon of using positive behavior interventions and support as behavioral interventions, we must get a true picture of what the overall staff perceives as this is vital to the sustainability of the framework. Another study could be done with the entire staff, whether they are implementing Tier II or Tier III interventions as some interesting results could come from why they do not currently implement them. These teachers either have very strong core behavioral instruction which does not require intensive behavioral interventions, or they do not

have a positive perception of the effectiveness of the framework. Either way, there is vital information to be learned which could help with PBIS practices at this school.

This same phenomenological study could be replicated at the middle or high school level. Other grade levels implement PBIS as behavior interventions, but according to research, it is not as prevalent. Given that all the participants were female as they typically are at the elementary level, by conducting this same phenomenological study in upper grades, the researcher has the potential to get male feedback as well.

As this study was a qualitative, phenomenological study, it is suggested that a quantitative study be conducted with the same population in order to gain statistics to support data. More in-depth research could show the number of office discipline referrals and watch how these are affected over time. Quantitative data could show percentages of students meeting the weekly rewards that teachers spoke of. The researcher could also get data on the number of students involved with Check-In-Check-Out and could monitor their percentage of success.

Concluding Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to investigate elementary school teacher perceptions of using positive behavior interventions and support as behavior interventions in one Pre-K-5 school in rural Northwestern North Carolina. Through the use of qualitative research methodology, the researcher was able to pull the underlying phenomenon about teacher perceptions of PBIS from the data. Because of the voluntary participants who underwent individual interviews with a proxy interviewer the principal investigator was able to obtain rich descriptions of teacher perceptions about using positive behavior interventions and support as

behavior interventions. This study was able to successfully synthesize an overall perception to create an “essence of experience” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014; Patton, 2015).

Chapter 1 provides the need for the research findings by giving an overview of the problem, overarching research questions, defining key terms important to the study, and reviewed the limitations and delimitations of the study. Contained in Chapter 2 is a review of pertinent literature which showed the history of PBIS, connected PBIS with behavioral theories, introduced PBIS intervention model, showed the importance for social validity, and presented stakeholders’ perceptions of PBIS. Chapter 3 delves into the qualitative methodology that included a thick description about phenomenological studies along with an explanation of the role of the researcher, ethical considerations of the study, setting, population, sampling strategy, data collection procedures, data analysis, and measures of rigor. Chapter 4 presents the reader with the researcher’s interpretation of the data derived through the qualitative process. This included profiles of the teacher participants as well as findings and emergent themes that were taken from coded transcriptions of individual interviews. Data was triangulated by looking for similar responses at least three times throughout the course of qualitative analysis. The principal interviewer provided data to support the emergent themes and related them to the study’s research questions. Chapter 5 contains a summary of the findings and conclusions from the research study along with recommendations for further practice and future research.

Although the findings from this study are unable to be generalized to any other school, it is evident that overall teachers have a positive perspective on using positive behavior interventions and support as behavioral interventions in this Pre-K-5 elementary school in Northwestern North Carolina. Teacher perceptions are ultimately what will determine the sustainability of a framework such as PBIS. In order to improve teacher perceptions for using

PBIS for all students, changes must be made in order to help the students who do not seem to be successful with any sort of behavioral framework.

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APPENDIX

Interview Protocol

Introduction

1. The Proxy Interviewer will welcome participant to the interview.
2. Explain the general purpose of the interview and why the participant was chosen.
3. Discuss the purpose and the process for the interview.
4. Inform the participant about the presence and the purpose of having the recording equipment.
5. Outline general overview of the ground rules and guidelines, such as being able to skip questions, or the interviewer cutting off the participant to insure that all topics are covered.
6. Address the assurances of confidentiality and privacy.
7. Inform the participant that information discussed will be analyzed, however the participant or school name will not be included.
8. Inform the participant that some direct quotes may be used, however, the participant will be allowed to review these statements before publication and a pseudonym will be used.

Discussion Purpose

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to investigate elementary school teacher perceptions of using positive behavior interventions and support as behavior interventions in one Pre-K-5 school in rural Northwestern North Carolina.

Discussion Guidelines

Please answer all interview questions directly, however, you may ask me to explain or repeat a question. If you feel uncomfortable answering a question, you may ask to skip it. The Proxy Interviewer is here to ask questions, listen to your statements, and answer any questions you may have. If we seem to be spending a lot of time on one question, I may politely interrupt you to ensure that we have enough time to cover all the research topics. The Proxy Interviewer will keep your identity, participation, and statements private. Please speak openly and honestly and share whatever you feel comfortable with. The Proxy Interviewer will recording this session to ensure that they do not miss any of your comments.

General Instructions

When responding to questions that will be asked of you in this interview, please exclude any information that would allow someone to identify you, students, staff, or name of the school. Any information that would permit identification will be kept completely confidential.

Interview Questions

1. What are your perceptions of using PBIS as a behavioral intervention?
2. What are your perceptions regarding using the PBIS framework to decrease negative student behavior?
3. How has classroom behavior changed in your classroom since the implementation of school-wide PBIS?
4. What changes have you noticed in school climate as a result of PBIS?
5. What are your perceptions about the PBIS framework's effect on academic achievement?
6. How do you implement PBIS in your classroom?
7. What changes have you seen in student behavior as a result of Tier II or III interventions?

8. What behavioral interventions have you found to be the most successful in your classroom?
9. What advice would you give teachers who are struggling with negative student behavior?

Conclusion

Answer any questions and thank the participant for his or her time.

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