Alternatively Certified Special Education Teachers' Implementation of PBIS

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Introduction

Positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) is a framework emphasizing the use of positive, evidence-based practices to decrease challenging behaviors among students and, in effect, increase their academic engagement (OSEP, 2018). Speaking to its efficacy when implemented with fidelity, PBIS was mandated in federal legislation for students with disabilities who demonstrate behaviors that impede their own learning or the learning of others around them (IDEIA, 2004). Over six and half million students ages 3-21 receive special education services in the United States (McFarland et al., 2018), and while service provision and outcomes for students with disabilities are continually improving, students with disabilities continue to experience significant obstacles in the transition to adulthood (Institute of Education Sciences, 2017a). Consider the following: (a) among youth ages 14-21 with disabilities, over 70,000 dropped out of school in during the school year 2014-2015, (b) also in 2015, 57.8% of individuals with disabilities ages 24-35 were neither employed nor seeking employment, and (c) students who began receiving special education in grades 1 to 8 were 55% more likely to be incarcerated and 69% more likely to engage in substance misuse in comparison with their same age peers not receiving services (Chesmore et al., 2016). To support positive outcomes for students with disabilities, the use of evidence-based practices such as PBIS is imperative.

PBIS represents a dramatic shift from traditional school discipline policies which historically have been reactionary in nature, focusing on punishments rather than alternative options. However, a significant body of research supports that punitive discipline measures are rarely effective in reducing negative behaviors (Benner et al.,2012; Richter et al., 2012; Simonsen & Sugai, 2013; Amemiya et al., 2020). Research on the effects of zero-tolerance policies such as suspension and expulsion support those punitive measures often result in unintended and detrimental outcomes for students including failure to complete high school and increased likelihood of involvement in the criminal justice system (Mowen & Brent, 2016). Compounding the problem, students of color experience zero-tolerance policies at much higher rates than their White peers (Shollenberger, 2015). Students with disabilities also have a long history of experiencing school disciplinary measures at rates higher than that of their peers without disabilities (Cooley, 1995; Sullivan et al., 2014; Zeng et al., 2021). In response, teachers, schools, and school districts across the nation are opting for alternative approaches to punitive measures that have traditionally been implemented (Curran, 2017).

PBIS provides teachers with a proactive approach to classroom management that is outcome oriented, and data driven. Several principles provide a framework necessary for implementing PBIS with fidelity. These principles include: (a) organizing the environment to prevent the development of problematic behavior, (b) teaching and reinforcing prosocial skills and behaviors, (c) implementing evidence-based practices for teaching desired behavior, and (d) continuously monitoring student performance and progress through data collection (Sugai et al., 2000).

PBIS is comprised of three tiers of support (Sugai et al., 2000; Sugai & Horner, 2020). All students are supported in Tier I. Proactive behavior management practices are promoted including the use of (a) positively stated behavioral expectations, (b) a ratio of at least four positives to one negative adult-student interaction, (c) positive reinforcement, and (d) pre-correction and reminders regarding undesired behaviors. At Tier I, the behavioral needs of 80% of a typical school's student population are effectively addressed.

Tier II addresses the needs of a smaller group of students who demonstrate challenging behavior, usually around 15% of a school's population (Sugai et al., 2000). These students display behaviors that are not responsive to Tier I support; therefore, they require more targeted assistance. For this group of students, interventions may include (a) home-school connections, (b) daily behavioral monitoring, and (c) intentional and frequent opportunities for positive reinforcement.

Students who display behaviors not responsive to Tier I or Tier II practices require more intensive, specialized interventions through Tier III to be successful (OSEP, 2012; Sugai et al., 2000; Sugai & Horner, 2020). This tier supports individual students, approximately 5% of the school population, who engage in significantly challenging behaviors. Interventions for students at Tier III include (a) team- and data-based decision making, (b) functional assessment-based behavior support planning, and (c) comprehensive student-centered planning. The behaviors which will be the target of the intervention are clearly defined, and then school personnel must determine resources available to assist the youth such as mental health service provision (Yeung et al., 2016).

The use of PBIS among students with disabilities has been studied empirically and the results are promising. The class pass intervention is a Tier II intervention developed to decrease disruptive behavior and teach replacement behaviors among students with high incident disabilities (Narozanick & Blair, 2019). The intervention involves teaching students to request a break by using a class pass. Students are also provided positive reinforcement for continued academic engagement without breaks by exchanging unused passes for preferred items, activities, or privileges. The use of the intervention was correlated with an increase in academic engagement and decrease in disruptive behavior among the participants. A Tier II intervention of daily report cards implemented among students with emotional behavioral disorders resulted in significantly improved behavior, time on task, and improvements in math and reading fluency (McDaniel et al., 2016). Self-monitoring interventions (Tier II interventions) have been correlated with increased academic performance (Guzman et al., 2018; Morrison et al., 2014) and decreases in challenging behaviors (Sluiter et al., 2019; Vance et al., 2012) among students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

Alternative Teacher Certification

The wide-ranging and often extensive needs of students with disabilities result in excessive amounts of stressors placed on special education teachers. Unfortunately, these stressors result in a high rate of attrition among special education teachers (Hagaman & Casey, 2018). To meet the demand for special education teachers and other high-demand areas including math and science, alternative routes to teacher certification programs were developed (Mason-Williams, 2015). Alternative certification programs provide pathways to teaching by allowing individuals with an undergraduate degree in any content area to obtain employment as a full-time teacher of record in a K-12 classroom while completing teaching credential coursework and other requirements such as licensing examinations (Parfitt & Rose, 2018). These alternative routes to teaching positively impact the supply of teachers, especially in the context of the persistent teacher shortages in high need areas such special education (IES, 2018). During the 2015-2016 school year, 676,000 (18%) of public-school teachers entered the field through an alternative certification program. Also, during this period, 20% of special education teachers were teaching on an alternative certification.

Theoretical Framework

Revans (1982) defined action learning as, "a means of development - intellectual, emotional, or physical - that requires its subjects, through responsible involvement in some real, complex, and stressful problem to achieve intended change to improve their observable behavior henceforth in the problem field" (p. 626–7). Revans formulated an equation to accompany the theory: learning = programmed knowledge + questioning insight. In this equation, programmed knowledge is expert knowledge, or knowledge contained in books for example (Weinstein, 1995). Questioning insight occurs as individuals reflect on their intuition and insight (Revans, 1989).

Using this theoretical framework to guide the analysis of participants' responses, the authors conceptualized the problem as classroom management and challenging behaviors displayed by students with disabilities. We conceptualized (a) learning as the participants' actions taken

toward implementing PBIS in their classrooms, (b) programmed knowledge as the theoretical knowledge of PBIS participants studied/learned in the course, and (c) questioning insight as participants' broader reflections of their experiences implementing PBIS.

In this study, alternatively certified special education teachers reflected on their experiences and identified benefits of PBIS at the classroom level and perceived barriers to its implementation. Through this research, we sought to understand how alternatively certified special education teachers could improve their implementation of PBIS after their course completion.

The research study questions were:
a) What are the perceived benefits of PBIS implementation for alternatively certified special education teachers?
b) What are the perceived barriers to PBIS implementation for alternatively certified special education teachers?

Methods

All participants in the study were teaching on alternative certification credentials and had completed a graduate level course on classroom management based upon PBIS. The state where the study took place has four preliminary special education teacher preparation standards addressing classroom and behavior management, and two of the standards specifically reference positive behavior supports (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2014). Therefore, the course provided instruction of the implementation of PBIS at the classroom and individual levels. The course also involved an action research project in which students collected baseline data on a pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade student's challenging behavior, developed and implemented a behavioral intervention, and collected follow up data to determine if the behavioral intervention may have impacted the student's behavior. After completion of the action research project, participants responded to a questionnaire to prompt reflection on perceived benefits and barriers to PBIS implementation in their teaching practices.

Participants and Setting

Twenty-eight teachers participated in this qualitative study. See Table 1 for participant characteristics. All participants were in their first or second year as the teacher of record in classrooms for a special education (SPED) pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade students with disabilities in self-contained or resource settings in public schools. Since these educators were working with an emergency waiver for SPED, it is possible they could have been classroom teachers prior to the study in a regular education classroom. Information on previous teaching experience was not collected for this research. Some of the participants were working in self-contained classrooms with students who had moderate to severe disorders. These students would include those who presented with intellectual disabilities, emotional, and behavioral disorders and autism. Other participants worked in a resource room for students with mild to moderate disabilities, such as a learning disability (Hallahan et.al, 2022). The type of classroom in which they worked is listed in Table 1 below. The previous teaching experience of the participants was not known as the surveys did not delineate. All participants in this study completed the course on classroom and behavior management based upon the principles of PBIS within 12 months before participating in the study. All participants were "emergency hires" teaching on an alternative certification teaching credential. In the state where the study took place, alternatively certified

teachers have two years to complete the required coursework and pass mandatory state licensing exams. Failure to complete the requirements results in a nonrenewal of the teaching contract.

Following Institutional Review Board approval, individuals who were teachers of record in special education classrooms teaching on an alternative certification and who had completed a course on PBIS were given an overview of the proposed study and were invited to participate. The overview and invitation to participate in the study were presented by a university faculty member other than the principal investigator (PI) to avoid any coercion to participate. The faculty member stated that the research was being conducted and did not state who was conducting the research. Prospective participants were advised that their participation was entirely voluntary and that their decision to participate or not to participate would not impact any of their course grades. Individuals who agreed to participate were provided with a consent form. The consent form was explained, and the individuals were given the opportunity to ask questions about the study.

Table 1. *Participant Characteristics*

Participant Name	Credential	Grade(s) Taught	Approximate Age	Previously Taught in General Education?
Brittany	Moderate to Severe	5th & 6th	< 24	No
Victoria	Mild to Moderate	4th & 5th	30 – 34	No
Tina	Moderate to Severe	Transitional K & 1st	24 – 29	No
Jasmine	Mild to Moderate	5th & 6th	24 – 29	No
Walter	Mild to Moderate	9th – 12th	45 – 49	Yes
Yolanda	Moderate to Severe	3rd – 5th	24 – 29	No
Misty	Mild to Moderate	K – 12th	35 – 39	Yes
Samantha	Mild to Moderate	6th & 7th	50 – 55	No
Nivea	Moderate to Severe	6th – 7th	24 – 29	No
Brandi	Moderate to Severe	K – 6th	24 – 29	No
Keith	Moderate to Severe	4th & 5th	45 – 49	Yes
Irma	Mild to Moderate	7th & 8th	35 – 39	No
Lenore	Mild to Moderate	K – 5th	35 – 39	No
Carmen	Mild to Moderate	2nd – 4th	24 – 29	No
Allen	Mild to Moderate	9th – 12th	30 – 34	No
Mark	Mild to Moderate	6th	35 – 39	Yes
Nellie	Mild to Moderate	6th – 8th	24 – 29	No

Craig	Moderate to Severe	3rd & 4th	35 – 39	Yes
Alyssa	Moderate to Severe	Pre K	24 – 29	No
Katherine	Moderate to Severe	6th – 8th	35 – 39	No
Erica	Moderate to Severe	1st – 5th	30 – 34	No
Ricky	Moderate to Severe	6th	24 – 29	No
Selena	Mild to Moderate	9th – 12th	24 – 29	No
Josephina	Mild to Moderate	6th	35 – 39	No
Darcy	Mild to Moderate	7th & 8th	40 – 44	Yes
Kaci	Mild to Moderate	K – 5th	24 – 29	No
Marina	Moderate to Severe	Pre-K & K	30 – 34	No
Andrea	Moderate to Severe	1st – 3rd	24 – 29	No

Materials and Procedure

Five focus group interviews were conducted. The use of focus groups was deemed appropriate for this study as it allowed the researchers to highlight diverse perspectives while the interactions among the groups had the potential to "enhance the data quality" (Patton, 2014, p. 478). Focus group questions were developed using peer checking to determine open ended questions that would allow the voices of the participants to emerge. The use of focus groups was determined to be beneficial because it encouraged participants to offer insights and opinions about their knowledge and perceptions of PBIS and how their classroom and behavior management practices were impacted by PBIS. The focus group questions allowed for interaction among the participants, leading to a rich understanding of the participants' perceptions of PBIS and their classroom practices related to PBIS Each focus group consisted of five to eight participants and was approximately one to two hours in length. (See Table 2).

A moderator guided each focus group based on the interview protocol. The PI moderated two of the five focus groups. The participants in these groups were not current students of the PI. The three other focus groups were moderated by an individual who has a doctoral degree in educational leadership and was trained in the protocol by the PI after the study received Institutional Review Board approval and before the study overview was presented to potential participants. The additional moderator for three of the focus groups was needed because participants in those groups were students of the PI during the time of data collection. The use of the second moderator ensured that participants who were currently students of the PI participated in focus groups led by someone other than their current instructor. The use of a second moderator helped to ensure that the participants were comfortable in sharing their honest and authentic reflections of PBIS and their classroom practices without any coercion of the power dynamics that can exist in professor/student relationships.

Table 2. *Interview Questions*

To what extent, if any, did the course on classroom management and PBIS impact how you approach discipline and classroom management?
How would you describe your classroom management approach?
How would you describe your daily interaction with your students with disabilities?
What does positive behavior management mean to you?
How do you handle discipline within your classroom?
When you do you involve your school administrators with discipline matters within your classroom?
Do you feel that positive reinforcement is effective for your students with disabilities? Please explain.
Do you feel that negative consequences or punishment are effective for your students with disabilities? Please explain.
Are there any other specific positive reinforcement strategies you conduct with your students that you have not already mentioned?
Are there any other specific negative consequences or punishment strategies practices you conduct with your students that you have not already mentioned?
Does your school have a PBIS system in place?
To what extent do you feel that are other teachers on your campus are knowledgeable of PBIS?
To what extent do you think there is a difference in knowledge about PBIS between general education teachers and special education teachers?
What suggestions would you give to a beginning special education teacher about discipline and classroom management?

Data were audio files and transcripts of the audio file from each focus group interview. The audio recordings were divided among the researchers and transcribed verbatim by the PI and the two other researchers. Following the transcription of each recording, each researcher listened to each recording while reading the transcripts to ensure accuracy of transcription. Discrepancies were discussed and through discussion, consensus was reached regarding the final transcription. As a member check, copies of the transcripts were sent to participants to read for accuracy and validity.

Data were analyzed using the inductive techniques of grounded theory. Data analysis began through the iterative process open coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) in which the raw data were examined, grouped, and assigned brief labels (Charmaz, 2014). To achieve triangulation (Golafshani, 2003), the researchers separately read and then coded the transcripts and constructed initial lists of emerging categories. For example, one researcher defined the primary themes as fidelity, training, misconceptions, and collaboration. Another researcher developed the initial themes of implementation, knowledge, and collaboration.

Through regular meetings the researchers used the constant comparison method to review the emerging categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Utilizing Revans' (1982) theory of action learning as a framework to guide our analysis, the researchers considered all of the themes that emerged and established the categories. Through the researchers' collaborative meetings, it was agreed that sub-categories reflective of distinctions within each broader category emerged. The researchers worked collaboratively to summarize findings for each category and subcategory.

Quotations from the transcripts were identified that reflected and underscored each category and subcategory.

Trustworthiness

Hesse-Biber and Piatelli (2012) discussed navigating power differences in the research process. The PI in the current study is a university professor, and while the PI did not conduct any focus groups in which the participants were students of the PI, some of the participants in the focus groups conducted by the moderator were her students at the time of data collection. Therefore, ongoing reflection and debriefing with the other investigators were necessary in order to assure fidelity of the analysis. Reflexive practices included: the use of notes taken during the focus groups, peer review, and member checks in which the participants reviewed transcriptions of completed transcripts of the interviews to provide input on how their words were utilized. In a technique described by Marshall and Rossman (2011) to establish trustworthiness of a study, the researchers critically evaluated the data at various stages of analysis, asked questions of the categories and subcategories, and scrutinized the data analysis.

Results

Utilizing Revans' (1982) theory of action learning in which learning equals programed knowledge plus questioning insight, the category of *practical application* emerged as representative of *programmed knowledge*. Here, two subcategories emerged: *strong* and *needs improvement*. When examining participants' responses related to *questioning insight*, two categories emerged: *personal satisfaction* and *resistance*. See Figure 1 for category branches.
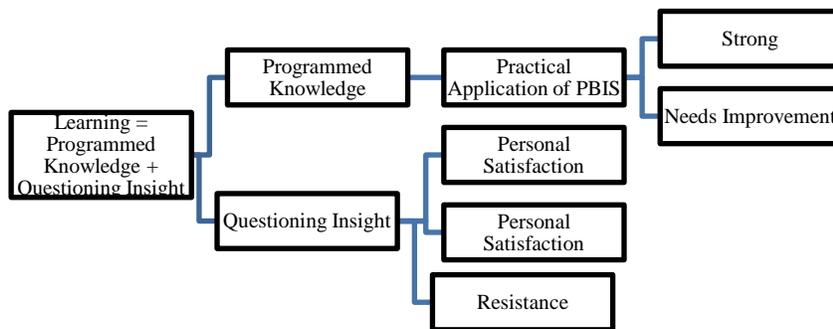

Figure 1. Categories and Sub-Categories

Programmed Knowledge – Practical Application

Within the construct of programmed knowledge, the category of *practical application* emerged and the subcategories of categories of *strong* and *needs improvement* emerged. In the subcategory of *strong,* participants reported their use of PBIS-based practices they applied with fidelity in their classrooms. Many participants identified Tier I strategies –strategies implemented among all students in classrooms. For example, a primary tenet of Tier I is the positive acknowledgement of appropriate student behavior (PBIS.org, 2019). A participant reported on the success of positive reinforcement in her classroom and how it was becoming ingrained in her approach to classroom management, "I find myself looking for more

opportunities to give kids praise and to reinforce their on-task behavior. It's starting to become a more of a natural thing." Another participant acknowledged the effectiveness of using the Tier I strategy of the 4:1 ratio. Here it is recommended that for everyone reprimand that is given, four positive statements are given to the student (Hunter et al., 2016), "I use the 4 to 1 rule that we learned... the 4 praises for 1 correction you make."

Several participants made references to the successful implementation and positive impact of token economies in which students are awarded with tokens, or other tangible items, when they display desired behaviors (Robacker et al., 2016). The tokens are later exchanged for a reinforcer. Comments included, "Using a token economy for the class to earn an incentive has helped a lot because it helps me keep them on track... everybody wants to earn that treasure box," and:

> I use a token economy system. After each subject they're able to earn a star... And then at the end of the week we go to the general education students' store. So, my students are able to participate in the general education system that they have going on and my students love it.

A participant also referred to utilizing another primary tenet of PBIS, analyzing the environment and context in which the challenging behavior is occurring (Simonsen & Sugai, 2013):

> I think for some extreme cases, not really personalizing what's going on, but thinking about what's really at the root of this behavior. Why is the student acting out? ...You've got to look at what's going on and you've got to try and find out what is the antecedent for the behavior.

Paraprofessionals work under the direct supervision of teachers (Mason et al., 2017), and therefore must adapt their practices if the classroom teacher makes an adjustment to class procedures. A participant reflected on the changes she was making toward implementing PBIS in her classroom with paraprofessionals who had been working in her classroom room for several years before she became the teacher of record, "They [paraprofessionals] used time out a lot which I haven't completely diminished. But it doesn't work. And I started using self-monitoring systems and other things like that and they help a lot." Another participant spoke of her work with her paraprofessionals in developing positive approaches to classroom management, "My paraprofessionals were 'tally happy.' They would take minutes away from my students as a consequence. My students now only earn points, and we are not taking points away from them."

Another participant described a situation in which she was a first-year inclusion teacher of a student who was demonstrating significant challenging behavior. The situation had grown so dire, and the parent had grown so frustrated with the number of phone calls she was receiving from the school, that the parent was giving significant consideration to home-schooling her child. The participant understood the urgency of the situation and arranged a plan with the general education teacher in which the participant developed a plan to positively support the student in his general education classroom as an alternative to the continuation of punitive consequences. It was a tremendous success, "Last year he was sent out like 78 times. This year he was sent out once." Likewise, students who have developed patterns of engaging in power struggles with their teachers find that teachers who utilize PBIS do not engage in power struggles, "I have some very

hardcore students who want to be the aggressor, but you are de-escalating the situation because you are using a more positive approach."

Within the subcategory of *needs improvement*, many participants identified scenarios in which PBIS strategies and interventions could have been applied but were not. For example, data collection is essential to PBIS. Data on student behavior should be collected continually to determine whether behavior interventions are effective in positively impacting student behavior, or whether the intervention needs to be revisited (PBIS.org, 2019). Unfortunately, only one teacher referred to the use of data collection regarding the implementation of PBIS in his classroom.

The course material provided participants with information about strategies and interventions related to all three tiers of PBIS, and the major project for the course required participants to develop and implement a Tier II intervention. However, when asked about using Tier II and Tier II interventions, participants' responses revealed numerous missed opportunities to develop and implement Tier II and/or Tier III interventions. For example, a participant explained that he resorted to sending students to the office when a Tier II or Tier III intervention may have been proactive in supporting the student in remaining in the classroom, "Just getting the element out of the classroom so that you can keep the rest of the classroom under control makes it necessary to send a student out sometimes." A participant did not make the connection that, even in self-contained classrooms/programs for students with significant behavioral challenges, a three-tier system can be implemented to support appropriate behavior among all students. In speaking about her practices, she stated:

> You either get suspended or you participate in the program. If you don't participate there's the door because …this [program] is voluntary. This is an opportunity, don't waste it. But you have those stubborn kids… and I don't want one student to ruin it for the rest. And unfortunately, there's sometimes when I have to sacrifice that one student for the rest of them, but it's all a choice. It's their choice. I give them that choice and then they do what they need to.

Another participant reflected on a student's significant challenging behavior but did not mention any attempts at a Tier II or Tier III intervention in an attempt to change the student's behavior. "It [the student's behavior] was unfair to other students because she literally shut up all my time all day. I had to spend all day with her because she is so out of control." Participants identified insufficient training and lack of school and district support as barriers to implementing Tier II and Tier III interventions. One participant stated, "There needs to be more training on Tier II and Tier III… even a training on just identifying those students is needed because that seems to be the struggle. Okay, we can find a Tier III [intervention], but what students do we put in there?" Another participant shared how she had been denied multiple requests for an FBA because the "school psychologist was not on board". Regarding district support, another participant stated, "In my district it's hard to do an FBA… There is no follow through, and if there is follow through it's not the correct… so I think [our] district as a whole needs to be trained on tier II interventions". Participants who had success with implementing Tier II strategies were teaching in schools where those systems were already in place.

Questioning Insight – Personal Satisfaction

Within the construct of questioning insight, the category of *personal satisfaction* emerged. Here participants reflected on their past classroom management ideology and implementation (for participants who had teaching experience before taking the PBIS course) in contrast to their current practices and ideology after having completed the course. Many participants affirmed the power of PBIS-based practices and identified benefits of PBIS within their practice, acknowledging a difference in using positive behavior supports in comparison their previous ideology regarding classroom management, "It [the course on PBIS] had a profound effect on how... I'm addressing students... it definitely opened my eyes up to new research-based strategies". These participants saw a paradigm shift in the difference between disciplinary strategies used when they were students themselves, and their use of PBIS as special educators:

> When I was growing up… when you think of becoming a teacher, you think of how teachers used to talk to you, how they disciplined. You have this idea of how you're supposed to be and then when you're learning all this stuff and think... 'Is that really gonna work?' And then when you see it working it's like 'Whoa! It's amazing!' And it works way better than yelling your head off… how some teachers do. And unfortunately, they still do.

Participants also reflected on the ways in which their students reacted to the movement toward positive disciplinary practices in the classroom and away from punitive practices, "Your students will react in a more positive way when you respond positively to them." Another participant added, "So because of our more positive response, because of us giving them more opportunities for them to change that behavior – before they had to deal with a negative consequence, they respond more to it, it's different."

A teacher of students with emotional and behavioral disorders reflected on student behavior that previously, before his implementation of PBIS, would have resulted in the student being suspended or expelled, is now navigated more productively:

> I know a little thing isn't really throwing a desk but sometimes it's like, "Okay, you just lost snack." Normally he'd be suspended real quick. Or, if a kid runs out screaming, "F--- you this and this!", I just follow him around talk him down. He sees the psychologist, goes back in the classroom, and we have a good rest of the day. And somewhere else, or maybe a couple of years ago, he would have been suspended for that. And so I feel like I have to implement PBIS in my room, or else it will not work.

Benner et al., (2013) found that teachers' ideologies related to discipline changed due to implementing PBIS. Likewise, a participant in the current study discussed a shift in his conceptualization of approaches to discipline in the classroom.

> It's [the course on PBIS] changed my… blame shifts. Instead of when things are going wrong... considering what are the children doing wrong, it's changed my thinking to, "What am I doing to affect the situation? How am I making it better or am I making it worse?" And that helps a lot.
> A participant expressed excitement at experiencing the efficacy of PBIS after he began implementing it in his classroom, "Within a few weeks to see that it worked, it was just like, 'Oh my gosh!' It was a lot! We just didn't just learn it, but to see it actually work was kind of neat!"

A positive impact of adopting PBIS on job satisfaction was also expressed by another participant:

> Teachers that adopt punitive education as their main way of dealing with problems, I just see them having way more problems and being stressed out and hating their jobs. And I love what I do. And people ask me, "How's it you're always so happy?" It's because I don't have the same problems you have.

Stronger teacher/student relationships resulting from the implementation of positive classroom management practices was recognized by multiple participants, "I… have a much stronger relationship with students. They know that 'He's supporting me… he's tryin' to encourage me… the things he's doing are totally to help me to improve or to do better.'"

A participant reflected on an in-service teacher training on PBIS that he led at his school. He reported that his colleagues were responsive to the information he was presented on PBIS because the punitive consequences that they had been giving to students were ineffective in reducing challenging behavior:

> We had them list all of the things that we do in the district as a consequence for students: lunch detention, trash pick-up, everything. After they listed all the things they could think of, we asked them to write the percentage of time this actually works. And without looking around the room at everyone else's answers, there was a consensus among all of the teachers of 1%...5%. It does work sometimes, with some students, that's true. But does it actually work? Punitive education doesn't work.

Questioning Insight – Resistance

Within the construct of questioning insight, the category of *resistance* also emerged. Participants spoke candidly of their colleagues' (e.g., paraprofessionals, administrators, general education teachers, school security) resistance and negativity toward PBIS, even though many of the individual's demonstrating resistance did not have substantial knowledge of PBIS. In some instances, the resistance seemed reasonable and simply due to a lack of knowledge. For example, one participant spoke of his colleagues' benign misunderstanding, "Some of the general education teachers I talked to do not think it is usable in their classrooms due to class size.*"* Participants also reported that general education teachers may not have sufficient knowledge of PBIS. When the participants were asked to what extent they felt there was a difference in the knowledge of PBIS between general education and special education teachers, participant responded. "Special ed = 99%. I would say general education… maybe 20%." Another participant added, "It's falls back on training. They don't take the same class we do, so they don't have the background knowledge, the practice". A participant stated that her general education colleagues simply do not believe in the efficacy of PBIS, "I think they can make time for it if they wanted to, but I think they think it's in vain. They do it because they feel like somebody's watching them, not because they feel like they are getting anything out of it."

Participants observed their general education colleagues' inconsistency and oppositional mindset when implementing PBIS in their classrooms. A participant stated, "The general education teachers know about PBIS but when I observe them, it seems to be a lot of negativity." Another participant describes, "There are teachers who say 'Oh, he [a student] did this and this on

Monday and Tuesday, so I am giving him to you [the special education teacher] on Wednesday.' They do not give him the opportunity to try and improve himself."

Several the participants expressed concern that their administrators often had minimum contact with their students with disabilities and lacked knowledge about PBIS. Within the framework of PBIS, students are recognized and may be rewarded for positive behavior, and little emphasis is placed on removing privileges (Swain-Bradway et al., 2013). A participant had knowledge of this concept, but reported that her principal did not, "Why would you take things away when you know they [the students] don't care? ...We know these things, but to see the research behind it kinda just helped me...they [administrators] say, 'Oh you're too nice.'"

      The feeling that administrators may not use PBIS when students with disabilities engage in disciplinary infractions was echoed by another participant:

> They're [administrators] not going try to figure out what the problem was, or not going to solve it. And then they'll remove this child from the instructional time. They're gonna send them home, escalate them and then I can't help them anymore.

While some of the negativity presented above may stem from a lack of knowledge, many participants reported negative attitudes of PBIS that may be indicative of a more significant obstacle. Participants discussed that other teachers who have not received sufficient training related to PBIS may hold misconceptions about it and may antagonize teachers trying to provide positive supports to students. A participant discussed that some of her students were struggling with their independent work in a general education classroom. The participant offered to change her schedule so that she could go into that classroom to provide positive support to the students. The general education teacher responded, "Yeah, we can just all come to your room and sing Kum Ba Yah". Sarcasm is a tone that was reported to be adopted by those unfamiliar with systems of PBIS when implemented with fidelity. A participant stated that that whenever talk of PBIS arose in conversation, statements such as, "Oh yeah, let's use PBIS because that *really* works," are often made. Another participant added:

> It's a collective eye roll from people [general education teachers] when they're talking about PBIS. We've never had a strong system, and I think that part of that is that they just didn't subscribe to that. I think that they honestly believe that wouldn't work.

It was troubling to hear that some teachers may be so deeply entrenched in punitive measures, they derive a feeling of satisfaction from assigning negative consequences:

> The big problem with our education system is that it is focused so much on that it feels good to suspend and get that revenge, and that does not work. We literally had a teacher on Valentine's Day make the lunch detentions out of hearts. He actually made hearts out of lunch detentions because it makes him feel good to give them out. So, in my homeroom, they bring me lunch detentions made out of hearts, and I think, "You've got to be kidding me." In five years of teaching, I don't get it.

There was an even more disturbing anecdote about what happens when school resource officers (SROs) opt out of positive behavior management practices, and all of the high schools in the area where the research took place employ school resource officers. A participant had unique insight

into the training of the SROs as he worked for several years as a SRO before becoming a teacher. He discussed the mismatch between the training SRO receive and the tenants of PBIS. The participant addressed the disregard SROs may have for PBIS and how that disregard can lead to SROs escalating, rather than de-escalating, student behaviors:

> Their training is all through the sheriff's department. So, the sheriff's department puts on training for the security that are in a school setting. So, they're taught police tactics that they can't use... but most of 'em think that they can use it, and they care little about PBIS. They know about it but, it's kind of like, they don't touch it. They get really frustrated at, "Oh, this kid ran from me. Why doesn't he get suspended?" … Or they all they'll instigate things. They'll tell a kid to take his doo rag off and if he won't, they'll have him handcuffed.

Discussion

When implemented with fidelity, ensuring that key components are addressed and sustained, PBIS helps establish a positive classroom culture that enhances learning and social environments for all students, including those with disabilities. The perceived benefits of, and positive experiences implementing, PBIS identified by the participants in the current study are consistent with previous research examining the efficacy of PBIS (Bradshaw et al., 2010; McDaniel et al., 2017). Similar to other research, participants in the current study reported that PBIS implementation has positively impacted their relationships with their students and was effective at decreasing challenging behavior and keeping students on task.

In the current study participants recognized their strong ability to implement Tier I strategies. In Tier I, teachers establish and explicitly teach their expectations and classroom routines, proactively acknowledge appropriate behavior, and develop procedures for correcting behavior when necessary (PBIS.org, 2019). Participants' numerous reports of improved relationships with students is reflective of a tenet of Tier I in which PBIS implementation is foundational in addressing the social and emotional growth of all students. Another common Tier I strategy is the use of reward or recognition of desired behavior (Hannigan & Hauser, 2015). Numerous participants identified the positive impact of rewarding and recognizing positive behavior through effectively implementing token economies. While Tier I strategies were identified multiple times by participants, Tier II, Tier III, or data collection strategies were minimally implemented and identified as areas of growth or needed improvement.

Perceived barriers to PBIS implementation identified by participants included their colleague's resistance to PBIS, which is concerning considering that all campuses had a school wide system of PBIS in place. Special education teachers continually work in collaboration with numerous other school staff, so it is unsurprising that participants referred to their work and collaborative efforts with others. One possible factor influencing school personnel's resistance to PBIS identified by the participants was individual preferences for sameness and aversion to change (Friend & Cook, 2017). The researchers refer to this phenomenon as homeostasis. As the evidence base supporting the use of PBIS increases, its use is becoming more widely adopted in schools (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012); however, teachers and other school personnel who are comfortable utilizing punitive systems of discipline may be inclined to demonstrate resistance toward a framework for behavior change based on positive supports.

Limitations

While this study yielded insightful information, the information gained should be considered in light of some limitations. First, the participants were exposed to and studied PBIS through one course using a specific textbook and assignments. There are several textbooks on classroom management based in PBIS and there are countless ways the course content can be delivered. Teachers learning about PBIS using a different textbook or assignments may have experiences implementing PBIS that differ from those of the participants in the current study. Another limitation is that in the current study, the researchers did not attempt to determine the extent of training and support in PBIS that the participants were receiving at their school sites. Teachers who receive a great deal of ongoing training and support in implementing PBIS will likely have different experiences implementing it in their classrooms and different experiences with their colleagues regarding the use of PBIS.

Implications

There is considerable variability in alternative certification programs (Quigney, 2010). Programs with insufficient or inadequate training may lead to students, including those with disabilities and/or those presenting significant challenging behaviors, being taught by teachers lacking sufficient knowledge and skills in effective, research-based classroom management skills and strategies (Flower et al., 2017). Rather than using evidence-based practices in their classrooms, teachers often rely on trial and error, a phenomenon referred to as the "research to practice gap" (Jones, 2009, p.101). To avoid the research to practice gap regarding classroom management, teachers must have a deep understanding of the concepts and skills related to PBIS in order for it to be successful (Blum & Cheney, 2009) and specific actions must be taken to implement PBIS with fidelity. For example, data must be used to make decisions regarding implementation and levels of support should be differentiated according to individual students' needs (Freeman et al., 2016).

While the participants made numerous references to Tier I strategies, very few references were made to Tier II and/or Tier III strategies. Tier II and Tier III interventions are essential components of classroom management plans based on PBIS because they focus on addressing students' needs such as inadequate peer relations, low academic achievement, and chaotic home environments (Sugai & Horner, 2002). Teacher preparation programs and school districts training their in-service teachers in PBIS should ensure that sufficient information and guidance are provided regarding the development and implementation of Tier II and Tier III strategies.

Teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders may have increased interactions with school resource officers because of the aggressive behavior that may be demonstrated by these students. As seen in the current study, teachers of these students implementing PBIS may find themselves at odds with the school resource officer's approach toward student behavior. As McCurdy et al., (2019) note, "Without specific guidance regarding the role and function of the SRO situated within a school that has adopted the PBIS framework it is unlikely that the SRO will function in alignment with the PBIS team." (p 1.). Therefore, it is imperative that SROs be fully trained in PBIS.

Approaches for proactively and positively managing challenging behavior have been repeatedly empirically validated since Skinner's (1953) foundational work in developing operant learning theory (Bradshaw et al., 2010; Colvin & Kameenui, 1993). However, rejections of positive reinforcement (Kohn, 1993; Tyre & Feuerborn, 2021) continue to resonate with teachers as seen in some of the participants' colleagues' resistance to PBIS that emerged in the current study. Research has also suggested that even when teachers state that they do not use punishment because it is not effective, their actual classroom practices demonstrate they do, in fact, employ punitive measures (Dovey et al., 2017). Therefore, when teachers implement PBIS in their classrooms, it is imperative that they receive sufficient training and support in all aspects of PBIS, including Tier II and Tier III interventions and the use of data collection, ~~in order~~ to ensure the framework is implemented with fidelity (Blum & Cheney, 2009; Gable et al., 2012).

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