POSTIVE BEHAVIOR INTERVENTION SUPPORT:
A PROACTIVE APPROACH TO IMPROVING BEHAVIOR

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Abstract

POSITIVE BEHAVIOR INTERVENTION SUPPORT: A PROACTIVE APPROACH TO IMPROVING BEHAVIOR

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Proactive behavior response teaches expectations and social interaction skills so students are better equipped to interact in a middle school setting. Students know what is expected of them and teachers spend less time reacting to problematic behavior. This action research project examined the impact of Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) implementation on reducing behavior referrals. 183 sixth grade students and 3 sixth grade teachers from Cherokee Heights Middle School in Madison, Wisconsin participated in the study. The findings from the research showed the total number of behavior referrals decreased during quarter two after the implementation of PBIS lessons. Interviews conducted with the teachers also indicated an overall positive response regarding PBIS implementation. Although more time, more participants, and disaggregate data would strengthen the study and lead to more in-depth program developments, PBIS significantly improves behavior and should be considered an essential curricular component of middle school education.
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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

Middle school can be a difficult time for many adolescents. Students are transitioning to a new, often larger school. Rapid changes in physical, emotional, social development and an underdeveloped sense of reasoning all increase the probability for acting out. Not to mention that being accepted by peers and fitting in is often more enticing than following inconsistent school rules. It’s no wonder then, that many adolescents entering middle school display disruptive behaviors in classrooms and other school settings. In some schools, “management of inappropriate student behavior has been found to consume as much as 80% of instructional time” (Sullivan, Long, & Kucera, 2011, p. 971).

There are two approaches to dealing with student behavior, reactive and proactive behavior responses. Sending a student to the principal’s office and publicly calling out a student’s behavior are examples of a reactive approach to discipline. Controlling problem behaviors through the use of general behavior management has the potential to increase the development of new and current cases of school problems (Algozzine, B. et al., 2012). The more effective method, proactive behavior responses, attempt to teach students desired behaviors and reward those positive behaviors instead of dwelling on the unwanted behaviors. PBIS, Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports, are described as “emphasizing effective systemic and individualized behavioral interventions for achieving social and learning outcomes while preventing problem behaviors” (Sugai & Horner, 2008, p. 69). Using the PBIS design, students are taught “academic and social interaction skills” (Sullivan, Long, & Kucera, 2011, p. 972). Once acquired, these skills equip students with the knowledge they need to behave appropriately in schools (Sullivan, Long & Kucera, 2011).
Statement of the Problem

To what extent do Positive Behavior Intervention Support lessons, taught over the course of one quarter of the school year, reduce behavior referrals for 6th graders?

Definition of Terms

Aggregate Data: Aggregate data refers to information that is based on multiple variables and is compiled into data summaries (Hidden Curriculum 2014).

Behavior Education Plan: A behavior plan currently being implemented in the Madison Metropolitan School District. “The plan moves our district away from a code of conduct based on a punitive model in favor of one that provides students with an opportunity to learn positive behavior skills” (Behavior Education Plan, 2015).

Behavior Referral: For all Response Level 2 and higher behaviors, a behavior write-up in Oasys is required. These behaviors require additional support from school-wide behavior response staff members (Behavior Education Plan, 2015).

Data Dashboard: “The MMSD Data Dashboard provides centralized data conveniently available online. It is designed to take many different types of data and provide it to users in a consistent format, with readily available visuals and features that allow for further, specific analysis” (Data Use Guides, 2014).

Disaggregate Data: Data that is broken down into smaller units of data (Hidden Curriculum, 2014).

Disruption: “Intentionally interfering with instruction in a manner than inhibits other students from accessing instruction” (Behavior Education Plan, 2015, p. 34).

Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports, known as PBIS or PBS: A program used to address behavior in the classroom and school (Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports - OSEP, 2015). “PBIS is an evidence-based disciplinary model that uses a three-tier system
of behavioral support. The first tier involves a school-wide system that creates clear and consistent expectations for student behavior and teaches behavioral expectations to all students” (Mergler, Vargas & Caldwell, 2014, p. 28).

Response Level 1 Behavior: Behaviors such as minor classroom disruptions and inappropriate language. These behaviors are dealt with in the classroom by assigned staff (Behavior Education Plan, 2015).

Response Level 2 Behavior: Behaviors include more intense or more frequent disruptive behaviors, bullying/harassment, throwing objects, and inappropriate physical contact (non-sexual). These behaviors require additional support from school-wide behavior response staff members (Behavior Education Plan, 2015).

Response Level 3 Behavior: Behaviors which require intensive intervention and administrative discipline. Example behaviors include setting fires, fighting, volatile acts, serious threats, and inappropriate sexual touching and/or contact (Behavior Education Plan, 2015).

Response Level 4 and 5 Behaviors: Behaviors which require intensive intervention, administrative discipline, and can result in long-term removal from school (Behavior Education Plan, 2015).

Purpose of the Study

Considering the effect of PBIS lessons on behavior referrals will give rationale into why PBIS is implemented in school districts across America. A general review of the literature will be provided to inform my development and implementation of PBIS lessons and evaluate their effect on improving classroom behaviors.

Significance of the Study
Research has shown that when implemented with fidelity, PBIS “reduces disruptive behaviors in a variety of school settings” (Sullivan, Long, & Kucera, 2011, p. 972). Rather than simply considering subjective evidence of observed improved behavior, this action research project looks at behavior data collected from Cherokee Heights Middle School in Madison, Wisconsin when comparing quarter two to quarter one, to evaluate the effectiveness of PBIS lessons on decreasing disruptive behaviors in the classroom.

The significance of the outcome is that by only changing a single factor, implementation of PBIS lessons, schools can determine if this decreases behavior referrals. When appropriate behavior is the norm in schools, teachers are able to increase time spent on student learning. In addition, “PBIS has been shown to improve academic performance, increase attendance, improve school climate, and sense of school safety” (Mergler, Vargas & Caldwell, 2014, p. 28).

**Delimitations of Research**

The results of this project are limited to 183 sixth grade students at Cherokee Heights Middle School.

The results of this project are based on the assumption that Cherokee Heights Middle School teachers are implementing PBIS lessons with fidelity.

The results of this project are limited by overall time of the action research.

The results of this project are limited to data collected through a formal Data Request and teacher interviews but not observations of student behavior. Data was only available aggregated because of requirements of the Madison Metropolitan School District, the district where the research was conducted.

The references used for the review of literature were collected over a period of 60 days using the resources of the Karmann Library at the University of Wisconsin – Platteville. The several
search engines provided by EBSCOHOST were used. The search engines ERIC, Professional Development Collection, and Academic Search Complete were especially useful. The key search terms were “Positive Behavior Intervention Supports”, “behavior referrals middle school”, “proactive approaches to behavior”, and “middle school discipline”.

**Method of Approach**

A brief review of literature relating to research, studies, and anecdotal evidence of PBIS success related to behavior in middle schools was conducted. The action research project completed compared behavior referral data (collected through a formal Data Request using Data Dashboard) at the end of quarter two to data from quarter one. The data was then examined to explore a possible connection (and to what extent) may exist between behavior referrals and an implementation of PBIS lessons. A triangulation of the data was completed through sixth grade teacher interviews, analysis of aggregate date, and personal conversation drawing conclusions from the data with Dr. Karen Stinson, UWP Director of School of Education.
Chapter Two: Review of Related Literature

Adolescence is a momentous time in a young person’s life. During this time, identity is formed and social norms are established. Students in middle school often struggle to fit in and follow the school rules. Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) is a program designed to help students and staff build positive relationships and lifelong social skills. Without a proactive system in place many adolescents spiral into a system of slowly withdrawing from school. But, with PBIS, adolescents can flourish and become productive adults with academic and behavioral skills.

Developmental Needs of Adolescent Learners in Multicultural Settings

Adolescents have a powerful desire to create their own identity. They are continuously striving to develop, know, and declare who they are as people. Erik Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development focuses on identity formation as a crucial element of adolescence (Erikson, 1959). Adolescents must meet basic needs in earlier stages of development in order to be ready to develop identity in adolescence. Erikson defines identity formation as, “The accrued confidence that one’s ability to maintain inner sameness and continuity is matched by the sameness and continuity of one’s meaning for others” (Erikson, 1959, pg. 89). By adolescence, confidence in oneself is needed to succeed in social and academic areas.

During adolescence, students experience what Erikson calls the crisis of identity versus confusion (Erikson, 1959). In this period, adolescents are feeling pressured to identify and fit into a classification of sorts. Students may identify as being athletes, geeks, or even popular. It is also during this time that students who have struggled with self-doubt and past failures (academically, socially, and behaviorally) can create an identity that may not be positive such as a trouble maker or gang member.
During this exploration period of identity, students are making choices about their identity with the overall goal of identity achievement (Marcia, 1966). Initially students may be exploring various possibilities for themselves without committing. They may change friends or style as a way to figure out where they fit. Finally, identity achievement, a stage in which students are comfortable with themselves, is established. This stage is often refined with age and experience, but helps adolescents with decision making and behavior (Marcia, 1966).

Multicultural schools are schools which are made up of a wide range of students from different backgrounds, speaking different home languages, and from a multitude of socioeconomic levels. Adolescents in multicultural schools often have many different identities to choose from versus more uniformly cultured schools. These students place a strong emphasis on sociocultural expectations and often live up to the expectations of their group’s identity (Seiffge-Krenke, Kiuru, and Nurmi, 2010). Additional influences come from parents. Adolescents whose parents were highly supportive during their middle years had higher levels of autonomy and a stronger identity (Seiffge-Krenke et al., 2010). In multicultural schools, where students may struggle with having so many different identities to choose from, choosing an identity with strong, positive sociocultural expectations, and having a supportive family can predict success both academically and behaviorally.

Many multicultural schools require the use of culturally relevant teaching to engage and meet the needs of all learners. Often new teaching practices include ideas for building background knowledge and incorporating students’ cultures and identities in the classroom. Without teaching practices which appeal to all learners, students often withdraw from class and can even become disruptive, affecting the learning of other students as well as their own. When students have negative social interactions, they often develop poor self-perception and self-worth
The way in which schools and educators manage inappropriate behaviors and negative social interactions can lead to further negative identity development for a student in a particular social or cultural group.

The use of exclusion from the classroom as a primary means for disciplining students has a disproportionate impact on African American, Latino, and American Indian students (Gregory, Skiba, and Noguera, 2010). African American students, for example, are three times more likely to be suspended than their white peers (U.S. Departments of Education and Justice, 2014). African American and Latino students are given harsher punishments and have increased odds of being suspended. This leads to high levels of anxiety and depression (Vincent, Tobin, Hawken, and Frank, 2012). This discrepancy also contributes to the racial gaps often seen in academic achievement. Research that looks at the disproportionality of student discipline rejects the idea that socioeconomic status or engagement in more serious offenses explains why students of certain ethnic groups are punished more often (Sharkey and Fenning, 2011). Without teaching practices which are aimed at meeting the developmental needs of adolescents through differentiation of curriculum and relevant, engaging lessons, disruptive behaviors often increase and learning suffers as a result.

**Effects of Disruptive Behaviors on Student Learning**

Behaviors that are oppositional, antisocial, and violate school rules are termed disruptive (Liber, De Boo, Huizenga, and Prins, 2013). These behaviors interrupt learning and can lead to large scale conduct issues if allowed to progress. Disruptive behavior problems in childhood often predict similar problems in adolescents and adulthood (Liber et al., 2013). Since disruptive behavior often cannot be ignored, schools and educators have two options for dealing with these behaviors, proactive or reactive discipline.
Reactive discipline approaches often remove disruptive students from the classroom or learning environment. When disruptions increase in severity and/or occurrence, negative consequences also increase in severity, often leading to in and out of school suspensions. These reactive approaches to discipline, often termed zero-tolerance discipline, are the most popular responses to students who break school rules (Skarkey & Fenning, 2011). Examples of zero-tolerance discipline include removal from the classroom and other school environments, loss of privilege, and eventually removal from school. Although common in practice, the outcomes of many of these zero-tolerance approaches aids in exacerbating unwanted behaviors, instead of preventing repeat behaviors (Skarkey & Fenning, 2011).

Recent studies have shown a correlation between exclusionary discipline practices and serious educational, economic, and social problems (U.S. Departments of Education and Justice, 2014). When schools demand too much or too little from students and do not balance discipline with formation of adult relationships, the behaviors leading to suspension increase (Bear, 2011). If students receive harsh punishments without interventions which serve to establish strong relationships, they will often act out more. Effects of punitive discipline practices include short term resolution of problem, failure to teach replacement behavior, and creation of a negative classroom and school climate (Bear, 2011). Without the addition of positive reinforcement, discipline curbs disruptive behavior short term but often exacerbates the negative relationship between school and the student.

In addition to the behavioral side effects of reactive discipline, there are also academic implications that result from these same consequences. Students are losing important instruction time due to discipline (U.S. Departments of Education and Justice, 2014). Increased instruction time increases the exposure students receive to curriculum. This in turn, increases the odds that
students will retain knowledge and grow academically. Students who lose academic time are at risk of reduced student achievement (Gregory et al., 2010). Beyond just simply not being in school, the long term effects of removal can be costly. When students are suspended they become disengaged with school, less invested in school work, and less motivated to achieve academic success (Gregory et al., 2010). Some research has even gone so far as to link low literacy achievement to aggression in higher grades (Gregory et al., 2010). Since a student’s middle school experience is so crucial to determining their future success, how schools establish positive relationships while maintaining appropriate student behavior can make all of the difference in increasing a student’s rate of success.

**Defining Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports**

Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) is an evidence based, proactive model which helps schools manage behavior and discipline. The model focuses on a three tiered system. The bottom tier includes universal practices and systems which help prevent the development of problem behaviors for all students. This tier considers aggregate data, teaches and monitors student behavior, and recognizes students and staff through a school-wide recognition system (Simonsen and Sugai, 2013). The second tier includes specialized instruction for about 15% of students who display at-risk behavior. This tier recognizes students who need additional teaching and monitoring, explicit social skills instruction, and increased mentoring (Simonsen & Sugai, 2013). The third tier includes specialized and individualized instruction for 5% of students who demonstrate high-risk behavior (SWPBS Implementation Blueprint, 2010). This tier includes forming student-centered teams, environmental changes, and consequence strategies to help students who display tracked problem behaviors (Simonsen & Sugai, 2013).
The tiered approach ensures that all students receive behavior and social skills teaching differentiated for their current level of ability.

PBIS has six defining characteristics which influence all of their practices helping schools positively respond to behavior. These practices are: preventative, instructionally oriented, culturally responsive, function-based, systems implementation focused, and evidence-based (SWPBS Implementation Blueprint, 2010). Preventative practices are those which create consequences that maintain and strengthen appropriate student behaviors. Triggers are identified and removed. Desired behaviors are taught across a variety of environments and are adapted to create relevant, practical practices. Instructionally oriented social skills are taught throughout the day and in all settings. Functional-based perspective looks into what the possible function of a behavior may be and teaching replacement, more appropriate behaviors. Systems implementation provides consistent teaching for all students and staff. Finally, evidence-based practices are those which have been proven effective based on numerous studies and research.

With a focus on positive reinforcement, PBIS strives to increase the probability of a behavior by associating that behavior with a consequence stimulus (SWPBS Implementation Blueprint, 2010). The goal is to reinforce the occurrence of a desired behavior while decreasing undesired behaviors. When students are reinforced for demonstrating desired behaviors rather than receiving a consequence or loss of privilege for demonstrating a disruptive behavior, they end up feeling more encouraged to display the desired behaviors. Students understand what is expected of them and consequences are consistent.

During adolescence, students are exploring their identity and establishing their self-worth. Adolescents challenge authority and do not consistently exercise good judgement (Losen and Skiba, 2010). Students in middle school need an established program which is geared towards
helping them make sound decisions through instruction, practice, and consistency. PBIS helps to reduce the removal of students through reactive discipline, improves school climate, and improves school safety (Losen & Skiba, 2010).

**Factors of Successful PBIS Implementation**

The goal of a PBIS school is to support students both academically and behaviorally using a consistent and straightforward approach (Coffey and Horner, 2012). Implementation of PBIS takes time and dedication on behalf of the school and staff. Developers of PBIS theorized it should take about three to five years to fully implement PBIS practices, but schools have found implementation actually only takes about one to two years (Bradshaw, Reinke, Brown, Bevans, and Leaf, 2008). By considering factors such as: priority, effectiveness, efficiency, and continuous regeneration, PBIS can be implemented with fidelity and success.

Priority is the importance placed on one practice in comparison to another. Having a priority to implement PBIS with fidelity, school staff members are more likely to carry out the implementation activities (McIntosh, Mercer, Hume, Frank, Turri, and Mathews, 2013). Priority also includes staff commitment, administrative support, integration into existing systems, and ongoing resources (McIntosh et al., 2013). From one school year to the next, there can be many new programs introduced into a school. But, in order for a program to be successful it needs to be endorsed by both staff and administration. It is advised that 80% of staff buy in to PBIS before implementation (Coffey & Horner, 2012). Once school staff have subscribed to the PBIS system, they need adequate training and alignment with current systems.

Training is a critical part of effectiveness, a factor which leads to sustainable PBIS systems. Effectiveness is the level of which a practice is useful and valid. Included in this is implementer skill and knowledge, and teaming (McIntosh et al., 2103). Training can come in the form of
school-wide professional development or a PBIS coach can be trained in the PBIS practices and can help lead implementation. Many struggles faced by teachers implementing PBIS is the development of lesson plans (Bradshaw et al., 2008). With staff buy in in place and a trained staff member qualified to design lessons and support staff through a teemed approach, PBIS has a better chance of survival in a new school.

Efficiency is a factor that considers the resources required to implement PBIS (McIntosh et al., 2013). When educational leadership has recognized the importance of a program and is motivated to implement the program, staff will be positively encouraged to buy in as well. Likewise, when administrators buy in to PBIS, the likelihood that the system will receive continuous funding increases. Without dependable resources, any program is at risk of failure.

The final factor that is essential to implement PBIS with fidelity is continuous regeneration. Continuous regeneration is basically data-driven adaptation of practices. Collecting data on a regular basis with fidelity will assure that PBIS is effective, relevant, and efficient. Within the data collection field, there should be a team in place to analyze data and make decisions about what practices are in need of revision (McIntosh et al., 2013). The role of this system is to continuously ensure that current practices are aligning with the school’s overall goal of PBIS implementation (Coffey & Horner, 2012). For example, if data is predicting that the number of behavior referrals increases immediately following all lunch periods, then the PBIS team could implement PBIS lessons as part of the universal system to help students transition back into the learning environment. Data should drive educational practices and be at the forefront of decision making. This ensures that all students are receiving education supports which are relevant, engaging, and valid.
Benefits of PBIS on Student Learning

Approximately 20,000 schools have adopted PBIS practices (Simonsen & Sugai, 2013). PBIS is a nationally acclaimed, research based system of teaching students how to be successful in school. This program teaches students social skills through effective and relevant practices. Positive behaviors are reinforced through school-wide acknowledgement systems and inappropriate behaviors are consistently responded to. Through the implementation of PBIS, schools have seen a reduction in office discipline referrals and improvements in student academic achievement (Bradshaw, Koth, Thornton, and Leaf, 2009).

PBIS is connected to improvements in school climate and perceptions of safety at school (Bradshaw et al., 2009). When students feel safe at school, attendance rates increase and students become engaged in learning. Many adolescents in multicultural schools come from a variety of backgrounds and from a multitude of socioeconomic levels. Since educators cannot control the home lives of students, it is important to assume nothing when preparing to teach. Before students can prepare for academic learning, their basic needs must be met. Part of an adolescent’s identity is feeling self-worth and value. Learning social skills and being positively reinforced for demonstrating behaviors which encourage community and relationship building helps develop a confidence students need to push themselves academically. The PBIS approach uses systems to minimize problem behavior, increase an adolescent’s quality of life, and increase their likelihood of success academically and beyond (Coffey & Horner, 2012).

Students who are suspended have decreased academic skills. By the age of four, disruptive behavior can become a dominant feature of a child's behavioral stock (Liber et al., 2013). Improving social behaviors, which work to counteract disruptive behaviors, leads to more student time engaged in instruction (Horner, Sugai, and Anderson, 2010). This is accomplished
through effective, relevant teaching which incorporates social skills and behavior. By establishing a positive, predictable, consistent, and safe school and classroom culture, students will be more engaged in learned and academic achievement will increase (Horner et al., 2010).

Across diverse backgrounds, PBIS is shown to be effective at reducing problem behaviors. In one such study, African American students receiving tier two interventions in middle school were successful in reducing their office discipline referrals, and benefited from more positive adult engagement (Vincent et al., 2012). Similarly, Latino students who in the same student received tier two support were encouraged to be more socially connected and also reduced office discipline referrals (Vincent et al., 2012). Schools are increasingly more diversified every year. Students come from different backgrounds, speaking different languages. It can be difficult for educators to find curriculum which appeals to all students and engages many different cultures. PBIS is a system which has been proven to be effective for all students, regardless of background or home language. It increases academic achievement through an increase in social skills and a decrease of problem behaviors.

Summary

Throughout adolescence, students are constantly pushing boundaries and testing adults. Adolescents seem to thrive on going against adult expectations. Psychologists Erik Erikson (1959) and James Marcia (1966) have described this period as an age of identity formation. Adolescents are building their confidence and self-image, attempting to find their place in the world. During this time, it is crucial that students be taught not only how to make good decisions, but also how to be good people.

During such an influential time, it is imperative that disruptive problem behaviors are intervened and positive social behavior is supported instead. Disruptive behavior is associated
with long-term negative outcomes, early school drop-out, and crime (Liber et al., 2013). When students are removed from the classroom as a way to deal with disruptive behavior, their behaviors are fixed short-term, but nothing is being done to build a stronger adult-student relationship.

Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) is a school-wide program focused on constructing relationships through strong community and social skill development. PBIS promotes fairness and equity through data-driven decision making (Skarkey & Fenning, 2011). When practices are determined by consistent and valid data, all students receive equitable services and interventions. PBIS emphasizes consequences and incentives that are balanced and create a safe school climate (Liber et al., 2013).

Implementation of PBIS should be done with fidelity and purpose. Schools need to consider priority, effectiveness, efficiency, and continuous regeneration in order to achieve successful PBIS operation. School staff and administrators should commit and fund PBIS programming. A PBIS coach or other staff members should be trained and should help organize lessons and other school-wide practices. Data should be considered with regards to desired school outcomes and should help shape the PBIS framework. With a strong program in place, PBIS will help effectively change school climate.

Schools which implement PBIS had reductions in discipline referrals and suspension rates (Skarkey & Fenning, 2011). Students feel safer in schools and more committed to their academic goals. Beyond just middle school, long term positive outcomes of PBIS include academic attainment and engagement in school or work (Liber et al., 2013). PBIS is a foundation for improving equity in schools. It creates inclusive classrooms and teaches adolescents the skills required to be successful in school and in life.
Chapter 3: Methodology

This study examined the impact of implementing PBIS lessons on reducing behavior referrals. This study compared the total number of behavior referrals of 183 sixth graders from first quarter to the total number of behavior referrals from second quarter after PBIS lessons were implemented. This study also explored how PBIS lessons are viewed from a classroom teacher’s perspective. The original hypothesis was PBIS lesson implementation decreases the total number of behavior referrals because students are explicitly taught expectations and social interaction skills which equip students with the skillset they require to behave appropriately in a school setting.

Research Design

The research design used for this study was action research in the form of aggregated data and interviews. The data was collected using an official Data Request through the Madison Metropolitan School District. In order to receive data regarding behavior referrals, it was required by the school district that data could not lead to individual student identification. This resulted in a request of aggregate behavior data.

The teacher interviews contained five open-ended questions regarding sixth grade classroom teachers’ attitudes towards the impact of PBIS lessons that were implemented. The questions were developed from the literature review that identified factors that influence positive and negative attitudes towards implementation of PBIS. The questions focused on feedback from the teachers regarding the PBIS lessons themselves, overall receptivity of the lessons by students, and observed behavior of students after lesson implementation. Action research was chosen for this study because many of the research studies reviewed in the literature emphasized the importance of consistent, data-driven PBIS programming in schools.
Participants

A total of 183 sixth graders in attendance at Cherokee Heights Middle School in the Madison Metropolitan School District were asked to participate in this study. The population included 35% White (not Hispanic) students, 26% Hispanic students, 29% Black students, and 10% Asian or Pacific Islander Students. Additionally, 62% of the student population was considered economically disadvantaged.

Additionally, a total of 6 sixth grade teachers employed by Cherokee Heights Middle School were asked to participate in the interview. The teachers received two requests to participate. Of those six teachers, three participated in the interview.

Instrumentation

The research instrument selected for this study was an interview comprised of five questions used to identify the sixth grade teachers’ attitudes towards PBIS lesson implementation. The researcher developed the interview based on work with the school’s PBIS team. The researcher’s PBIS partner was solicited to complete a pilot of the interview in order to check for understanding before implementation. A copy of the interview can be found in Appendix B.

The other research instrument used was a formal Data Request submitted by the researcher to the Madison Metropolitan School District. Behavior data is controlled by the district to ensure students are not identified through the data. Compliance with the district’s process led to the accrual of aggregate data, since disaggregate data was unavailable.

Procedure

Approval of the study was given to the researcher by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Wisconsin-Platteville on August 13, 2015, IRB Protocol #2015-16-08. A
formal request was made to the Madison Metropolitan School District to implement PBIS lessons and conduct teacher interviews and written permission was received on October 15, 2015, MMSD Proposal #2015.9.9. The sixth grade students took home a letter informing their guardians of the details and purpose of the study. Appendix D is the letter that was sent to parents. Any parents who did not want their child to participate were allowed to opt out and that data was then not used as part of the study. The sixth grade teachers were given a letter asking them to participate in the research study and were encouraged to answer the items honestly and accurately. The letter explained that the survey results were anonymous. Both letters included contact information of the researcher in case the sixth grade teachers or guardians had questions during the research or wanted results after the study was completed.

The PBIS lessons were created by the researcher, PBIS partner, and PBIS team, following the parameters established by the PBIS training materials. Teachers were given training on lesson implementation for approximately fifteen minutes every Wednesday during quarter one sixth grade meetings. Lessons were implemented during second quarter. The lessons were taught every Monday for twenty-five minutes during morning homebase time, a time dedicated to Social Emotional Learning Standards instruction. If students were absent from the homebase period, one of the team members would contact the student to provide them a quick summary of the lesson taught, but often students who missed the session did not receive the full instruction.

Analysis

The behavior referral data was acquired through a formal Data Request at the conclusion of quarter two. The total number of behavior referrals from quarter two was compared to the total number of behavior referrals from quarter one. This information could be used in
combination with the teacher interview responses by the school to make any needed changes to insure a successful PBIS program is implemented.

Summary

This research study was conducted to examine the impact of implementing PBIS lessons on reducing behavior referrals. This study used action research in the form of a formal Data Request and sixth grade teacher interviews. Data was collected through a five question interview and a formal request of aggregate behavior referral data. Total behavior referrals were compared from quarter two to those of quarter one to identify if PBIS lesson implantation was successful in reducing behavior referrals. The results from all the sixth grade teacher interviews were examined to determine what factors influenced positive and negative attitudes towards PBIS lesson implementation. In the next chapter the data obtained was presented in the form of a table. The behavior referral results were compared to identify if behavior referrals decreased following implementation. Final results from teacher interviews were analyzed to identify positive and negative feedback towards PBIS lesson implementation.
Chapter 4: Results and Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of implementing PBIS lessons on reducing behavior referrals. The results of the study were measured in two ways, through a formal Data Request looking at aggregate behavior referral data and through teacher interviews. The population consisted of 183 sixth graders and 6 sixth grade teachers (not including myself) at Cherokee Heights Middle School in the Madison Metropolitan School District. Behavior referral data was collected on all 183 students. Of the 6 sixth grade teachers, 3 participated in the interview despite two attempts for participation.

Results

The formal Data Request was filed at the conclusion of quarter two requesting aggregate behavior data for quarters one and two. The data displays quarter one and two dates and then gives the total number of behavior referrals for those date ranges. During quarter one, total behavior referrals totaled 277. During quarter two, total behavior referrals totaled 220. Behavior referrals decreased by 57 behavior referrals during quarter two, or a decline of 20.6%. The following figure indicates the data received.
The results show that behavior referrals decreased by 20.6% during second quarter following PBIS lesson implementation.

The interview asked the teachers to give feedback regarding PBIS lesson implementation in the sixth grade classrooms. Two attempts were made to receive interviews. The researcher received consent from three participants out of six asked.

**Analysis of Data**

The data shows there is a significant decrease in behavior referrals following the implementation of PBIS lessons. The decrease is statistically significant because of its observed effect on student behavior and overall school climate. Since the data is not raw data, correlations cannot be run. The results show that when students are explicitly taught expectations and social interaction skills the number of behavior referrals decreases. Additionally, the results suggest
that positive significant relationships in combination with proactive responses to behavior lead to a decrease of undesirable behaviors within the classroom.

According to the teacher interviews, most lessons took approximately 30 minutes to implement. Also, students were generally receptive to lessons and actively participated. Most teachers reported that students were respectful to one another and knew the expectations required of them. One behavior concern voiced by some participants was that PBIS lessons do not reach all students and many students were absent during implementation. Overall, when students were made aware of expectations and time was built into the school day to teach Social Emotional Learning Standards, behavior improved.

Summary

Aggregate behavior referral data was compared from quarter one to quarter two to examine the effectiveness of PBIS lesson implementation. An interview consisting of five questions was given to 3 sixth grade teachers to determine the teachers’ attitudes towards PBIS lesson implementation. The data shows there is significant reduction in behavior referrals following PBIS lesson implementation. Additionally, the majority of teachers observed positive student interactions and behavior resulting from PBIS lesson implementation. Although teachers had positive attitudes towards PBIS lessons, the majority felt the early timeframe during which lessons were implemented needed to be changed and were concerned about lesson ineffectiveness for students with numerous behavior referrals.
Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

This study examined to what extent do Positive Behavior Intervention Support lessons, taught over the course of one quarter of the school year, reduce behavior referrals for 6th graders. The data collected shows that the majority of sixth grade teachers have positive attitudes towards PBIS lesson implementation. The majority of teachers agreed that students actively participated in lessons. They also agreed that when students are taught Social Emotional Learning Standards, there is a reduction in observed inappropriate behaviors. Aggregate data collected through a formal Data Request confirmed a reduction of the total number of behavior referrals from quarter one to quarter two during the 2015-2016 school year.

Strengths of Study

The perception from 3 sixth grade teachers as obtained through the and the weekly PBIS lessons created by the researcher were the main strengths of the study. The lessons and questions incorporated factors found in the literature that are considered essential components of PBIS programs.

The lessons taught students expectations and social interaction skills. Following the implementation of PBIS lessons, behavior referrals decreased.

The questions asked during the interviews focused on obtaining feedback from the teachers regarding the PBIS lessons themselves, overall receptivity of the lessons by students, and observed behavior of students after lesson implementation. Overall, the responses received by teachers regarding PBIS lesson implementation were positive. Perception from the three teachers that actively taught students gave actual classroom observations of students’ positive
social and behavior skills. These skills were observed through interactions with the teacher and each other.

**Limitations of Study**

One limitation of the study was the sample size. Only sixth graders during one quarter of the school year were asked to participate in the lessons. Also, only three teachers consented to the interview despite repeated requests. Future studies should use a larger sample size and should collect data over time or from several different middle schools with similar demographics.

A second limitation of the study was the use of aggregate data. Due to the confidentiality restrictions of the Madison Metropolitan School District, aggregate data was the only data available. Without the use of aggregate data, the researcher would be able to determine whether behaviors were reduced for one specific student, or whether inappropriate behaviors reduced for a majority of students. Future studies should utilize disaggregate data to determine effectiveness in reducing specific behaviors. Disaggregating by race, gender, age, and disability may also yield information useful in the research to help customize the PBIS lesson to students needing the most assistance.

Another limitation was the time when lessons were implemented. Many students, particularly economically disadvantaged students, are tardy to school and missed PBIS lesson instruction. Finding a time when the largest percentage of students are present would ensure most students are receiving instruction.

A final limitation is the assumption that Cherokee Heights Middle School teachers are implementing PBIS lessons with fidelity. This limitation is difficult to counteract since classroom instruction is not monitored. Additionally, it is possible that teacher attitude may be a
major factor in determining the effectiveness of PBIS, since 3 of 6 teachers did not respond to the study.

**Significance of the Study**

When evaluating the results of this study the data gathered supports the hypothesis which states that PBIS lesson implementation decreases the total number of behavior referrals. The number of behavior referrals from quarter one to quarter two decreased by 20.6%. This number demonstrates a statistically significant change for both the school and individual students. Overall, the majority of teachers have positive attitudes towards the implementation of PBIS lessons. The study shows that students who receive PBIS instruction are explicitly taught expectations and social interaction skills which equip students with the skillset they require to behave appropriately in a school setting. The factors needing additional considerations include early timeframe during which lessons were implemented since students who have behavior concerns are frequently late to school. Moving the PBIS sessions to a different time frame may yield better results. An additional consideration should be made regarding lesson effectiveness. PBIS lessons were effective for the majority but less effective for students with numerous behavior referrals.

**Self-Reflection**

I learned that the majority of our teachers and students respond positively to PBIS instruction. Students benefit from knowing expectations and learning how to behave appropriately in different social situations. Data from this study proved that explicit teaching around expectations did in fact have a positive effect on reducing behavior referrals. The data also helped reinforce my classroom observations about students’ behavior improving from PBIS instruction.
Teachers benefit from explicitly teaching the lessons instead of simply assuming students know how to behave. The research also showed which teachers were willing to participate in helping improve the behavior of our school based on their participation in my interview survey. Most importantly, I learned that proactive approaches to behavior actually work. I understand that there are factors of PBIS that need to be reevaluated at our school including homebase time and how to teach behavior interventions to students at tier two or three.

**Future Research**

A focus on larger groups of students and behavior progress over time would offer more insight into PBIS lesson effectiveness. Also investigating disaggregate data to determine which behaviors decrease from PBIS lesson implementation and which behaviors need more intensive instruction would be beneficial for further exploration. Finally, a further attempt to get more feedback from teachers in order to evaluate PBIS lesson effectiveness for all students would give insight into teacher attitude and its effects on PBIS success.

**Summary**

The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of PBIS lesson implementation on reducing behavior referrals. The results of research indicated that PBIS implementation may be effective, even with only one quarter of implementation. The results were positive and showed a decline of 20.6% in discipline referrals from the first quarter to the second quarter after implementation of PBIS. Further research may indicate that there are additional and continued positive benefits of PBIS lesson implementation.
References


Doi:10.3102/0013189x09357621


Appendix A: MMSD- Social Emotional Learning Standards

POWER STANDARD 1: Emotional Development - Understand and manage one’s own emotions as well as express empathy.

Key Concepts:

Personal Emotions: Identify, express, and manage emotions effectively to facilitate emotional growth.

Empathy: Recognize and understand others’ feelings while building awareness of how one’s behavior influences others.

POWER STANDARD 2: Self Concept - Develop positive self-identity and recognize self as a lifelong learner.

Key Concepts:

Positive Self-Identity: Identify personal traits and values to develop self-competence and self-esteem.

Lifelong Learner: Set and achieve goals to enhance personal success.

POWER STANDARD 3: Social Competence - Establish and maintain positive relationships by respecting others, practicing social skills, and making responsible choices while recognizing civic responsibility.

Key Concepts:

Respect Others: Identify and respect multiple points of view by discovering commonalities and embracing differences amongst each other.

Social Skills: Build and maintain positive relationships through effective communication, cooperation, and conflict resolution.

Responsible Choices: Apply critical-thinking skills while making decisions, following expectations, staying safe, and advocating for oneself.

Civic Responsibility: Help others in our community and engage in positive activism.
APPENDIX B: Teacher Interview Questions

These interview questions are designed to collect anecdotal information from homeroom teachers implementing PBIS lessons.

1. What feedback do you have on the design and set up of the PBIS lessons (both positives and negatives)? How long did it take to implement PBIS lessons?

2. How responsive was the class to the implementation of PBIS lessons?

3. What observations did you make, if any, regarding the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the PBIS lessons in reducing inappropriate behaviors?

4. What are some current strengths you observe regarding student behavior?

5. What are some current concerns you still have regarding student behavior?
APPENDIX C:
CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION OF HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH

1. Purpose: The purpose of this study is to determine the effectiveness of PBIS lessons in reducing overall behavior referrals for 6th graders at Cherokee Heights Middle School during the 2nd quarter of the 2015-2016 school year.

2. Procedure: Following the implementation of PBIS lessons, you will be informally interviewed to collect anecdotal evidence about your homebase students’ overall observed behavior.

3. Time Required: Participation is expected to take approximately 15 minutes.

4. Risks: There will be no immediate risks to participants other than the time and effort required to participate in the study. No long term risks are foreseen.

   Benefits: Understanding which factors better predict behavioral success is of value to universities, instructors, and students. For example, such information could help us better identify whether PBIS lessons alone are influential in reducing behavior referrals.

5. Your rights as a participant: Participation in this study is voluntary. The information gathered in this study will be used in a confidential form. Data or summarized results will not be released in any way that could identify you. Data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet for up to a year. If you want to withdraw from the study at any time, you may do so without penalty or repercussions. The information collected from you up to that point would be destroyed if you so desire.

   At the end of the study, participants will be given a debriefing detailing the exact purpose of the study. If you have any questions afterward, please ask your experimenter or contact:

   Samantha Moen, Researcher
   Dr. Karen Stinson, Faculty Sponsor
   Department of Education
   University of Wisconsin-Platteville
   (608) 342-1253

   Once the study is completed, you may request a summary of the results by contacting the above researcher or faculty sponsor.

6. If you have any questions about your treatment as a participant in this study, please call or write
   Barb Barnet
   Chair, UW-Platteville IRB
   (608) 342-1942
   barnetb@uwplatt.edu

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I have read the above information and willingly consent to participate in this experiment. In doing so, I am giving Samantha Moen permission to interview me, and then to provide that information (coded by a confidential ID number) to the researchers.

Please print your full name (First, Middle, Last):

_________________________________________________________________________________

Signature: _______________________________ Date: _________________
October 6, 2015

Dear Parents/Guardians:

In fulfillment for my Master’s of Science in Education degree, I am completing an action research project looking at the effectiveness of Positive Behavior Interventions & Supports. PBIS lessons are regularly taught to all students in grades 6-8 during their Monday homebase time. As part of my action research I will be looking at aggregate behavior referral data from quarter 2 and comparing that to aggregate behavior referral data from quarter 1. My goal is that by focusing PBIS lessons on specific community building and other Social Emotional Learning Standards, behavior referrals will decrease.

The data I review will be collected through a formal Data Request through the Madison Metropolitan School District. I will not be personally collecting or tracking any behavior referral data. Additionally, students will not be able to be individually identified from the data. At the close of my study, I will draw conclusions based on the data and may publish the data in my final thesis.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact myself or my sponsor:

Samantha Moen, Researcher  
(608) 204-1290  
sjmoen@madison.k12.wi.us

OR

Dr. Karen Stinson, Faculty Sponsor  
Department of Education  
University of Wisconsin-Platteville  
(608) 342-1253

Sincerely,

Samantha Moen