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PBIS: Moving Beyond a Focus on Behavior to Relationships

Sylvia Chavez
California State University, Monterey Bay

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California State University Monterey Bay

Abstract

School-Wide Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (SW-PBIS or PBIS) is a classroom management system that has become increasingly popular in our k-12 educational systems. PBIS was originally created for special needs students and it is now being enforced in schools with a majority of minority students. This classroom management method relies on a token rewards system that focuses on reinforcing positive behavior in the classroom. Issues with this classroom management system encompass it being a form of exclusionary discipline, a student conditioning system and not a culturally grounded/responsive system. For this Capstone Project, teachers and students were interviewed to better understand their thoughts on ways to improve PBIS. Improving PBIS is important because the reward system used, raises questions as to whether students are being controlled and conditioned versus encouraged to grow in a holistic manner. Based on an analysis of the data and the relevant research literature, the researchers used what they learned to formulate an action that responded to the focus issue in a way that inspired, informed, or involved a particular audience.

Setting the Stage

I grew up in a Mexican-American household with my two siblings and parents, more specifically with a Mexican father who migrated to the United States at age 15 for a better future. A father who has always seen education as a key factor to success, and a father who was not fortunate enough to receive an educational career due to financial issues in Mexico. As a result, my father made sure to grant his children the opportunity to be educated and always taught us the importance of receiving an education. This is one of many reasons why I am now completing my final semester as an undergraduate at Cal State Monterey Bay (CSUMB) as a Liberal Studies student. I plan on attending the CSUMB credential program beginning summer 2018 and eventually complete my goal of becoming an elementary school teacher.

The relationships within my family are very close. Ever since I can remember, my mother did a great job at being honest with us in order to maintain an open relationship. Successfully, my mother managed to teach me the value in honesty. Like many children, my parents were my role models and the only people I could truly look up to at the time. I never wanted to disappoint my parents which led me to try hard in school and not to lie.

During eighth grade, I was continuing my second year in the 'Advancement Via Individual Determination' (AVID) program. This program ensures that students are on the correct path to attend a 4 year university once they complete high school. As a requirement for this program, every week we would have a worksheet in which we focused on any academic question we needed answered. At the end of the week, we would turn in our worksheet with our question answered. In one situation, I turned in a worksheet where I had erased my name many times making the "Name" line at the top of the worksheet look gray and worn out. That Friday, after everybody left class, my teacher said she wanted to talk to me. She then proceeded to barrage me with questions as to whose worksheet I had stolen and turned in as my own. I tried to explain the situation to her, but in return I was told I would not receive credit for the assignment because she thought I was lying. I walked out of the class, with a knot in my throat, wondering how I could tell my parents that I would not receive credit on my work. Once I got in the car, as

usual, my mom asked how my day at school had gone. At this point, I could not hold it any longer and I began to cry as I told my mom that I had been accused of lying. Immediately after seeing my disappointment, my mother took me back to have another conversation with the teacher, which resolved the issue.

Although I had been with this teacher for a few months at the time, she only knew about me, but she did not truly know me. Before being faced by my parent, this teacher did not understand where I came from and proceeded to produce an emotional toll on a young, innocent student's feelings. For the reason that education and honesty were a priority in my house, I was emotionally wounded after facing this dilemma. Following this incident, the teacher would acknowledge me more during class time. There were more conversations asking how I was feeling and making sure I was content.

It is critical for educators to build relationships with their students in order for them to understand the student and his/her actions. When communication between student and teacher is minimal, the student is more likely to view the teacher as superior. This was absolutely what occurred in my situation, so naturally I did not have the power to continue arguing my position to the teacher, even after knowing I was stating the truth. In reward programs, there is a focus on student behavior which takes away from the importance of building student/teacher relationships. Creating Culturally Responsive Classroom Management (CRCM) would require teachers to form a connection with their students. These connections will lead to success in a student's education as well as his/her interaction skills.

Introduction

Educators aim to reach their goal of academic teaching on a daily basis. However, students' misbehavior will usually have a negative impact on other students learning and possibly the teacher's lesson. School-Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (SW-PBIS or PBIS) is an expanding program designed to "support all students through intervention ranging from a school-wide system to a system for developing individualized plans for specific students" (El Dorado, 2017). It is highly recognized for

its focus on rewarding students who have completed an action deemed "appropriate" in their situation.

What is the Issue?

The programs set up consists of a set of (3) tiers, in which students are categorized in response to their behavioral actions during school hours. The general population is enclosed into tier 3, in which positive conduct is promoted. Students who fail to succeed in proper actions are moved into tier 2, working in a small group. Students with severe behavioral issues are worked with individually (Fraczek, 2010). The actions may be considered "appropriate" by any [present] adult on campus, as they are all given the opportunity to distribute scholar dollars, an example of rewards at one school. Students are also expected to follow a behavior matrix that is constantly being implemented throughout the school with the use of large posters. However theorist Burrhus Frederic Skinner states that, "Rewards and punishments do not always have predictable effects" (Skinner, 1969, p.8). Therefore, a system in which students are rewarded, does not guarantee all students will conduct positive behavior.

Whether it is in the classroom, cafeteria, hallways or out on the playground, "the emphasis is on the use of the most effective and most positive approach to addressing even the most severe problem behaviors" (PBIS.org). At El Dorado Elementary, where this research has taken place, they partake in the use of "scholar dollars", an incentive used to reward students. Scholar dollars is used as money that can be spent at the student store and to purchase a "membership". A membership is the key to PBIS activity days, which occur monthly. For kindergarteners, a membership is worth 50 scholar dollars; On the other hand, first-sixth grader must collect 100 scholar dollars to afford a membership. All students who could not afford a membership by the activity day are isolated into a classroom with the other unqualified piers.

PBIS expects teachers who witness positive behavior to praise the student committing the action. Although reward systems are usually associated in a positive manner, according to Lagerwerff (2016) they can minimize the opportunity of students' choice. He claims that, "Their choices are to do exactly what the teacher wants and

receive empty praise, or to go against what the teacher wants and be publicly shamed when they do not receive the reward" (Lagerwerff, 2016). The use of a reward system such as PBIS teaches students that there is only one manner to behave, which will be dictated by their superiors (educators), as they are the ones providing rewards (Lagerwerff, 2016). Educators involved with PBIS are creating a distinction between teacher and student, the giver and the taker. "Rewards distance all of the relationships in a classroom, especially those between teachers and students. What our students (and we) crave is human connection"(Lagerwerff, 2016). Denying this connection could lead students to fail the learning of self-implemented decision making.

PBIS is structured into tiers and is attempting to categorize all students into one particular tier, removing their specific individual needs from consideration. Vaughn (2006) states that trends that attempt to help larger number of students move "away from the exclusive focus on individualized positive behavior support" (Vaughn, 2006 p. 66). In other words, students are less likely to be seen for their individual progress. Removing focus away from students' individuality portrays the idea that students could simply change their actions and do the "right thing". However, more diversity in school means more life stories and more backgrounds, and as Lagerwerff (2016) indicates, a student's "...history could not be erased or reconciled with stickers or candy". When educators fail to consider a student individually, they are disregarding the importance their life outside of school and the impact it creates on their actions.

Fraczek (2010) points out how the cultural discrepancy between students and Caucasian teachers, with significant population of teachers in American schools, "can lead to tensions, disconnect and cultural mismatches when it comes to disciplinary practices" (Fraczek, 2010). For an educator, a good relationship with a student should consist of some knowledge of his/her cultural background. There exists a variety of cultures which each consists of different values, this differentiates backgrounds. "With students in a less powerful position than teachers, this may create misunderstandings that lead to a larger number of referrals for students from outside the dominant culture"(Fraczek, 2010).

Post to implementing PBIS into a school setting, studies have proven that the amount of students receiving negative consequences dropped significantly. However, "...there is little detail on how the SWPBS model works in schools that enroll culturally diverse students and students who live in poverty" (Vaughn, 2006, p.67). Shifting towards PBIS increases the goal for proper behavior and decreases the significance of a culturally responsive classroom. The distinction between non-native speakers and American students having a successful experience with PBIS has yet to be proven (Fraczek, 2010).

What could be done?

The Positive Behavior Intervention and support program has shown great significance when it comes to promoting a more favorable school environment. However, making positivity the center of attention diverts the gravity away from cultural comprehension in the classroom. To ease the inclusion of culturally appropriate management, as shown in figure 1 below. 1. Excessive resources to implement classroom management for present and future teachers. 2. Moving toward a more humane environment in the classroom. 3. Implementing Culturally Responsive Classroom management.
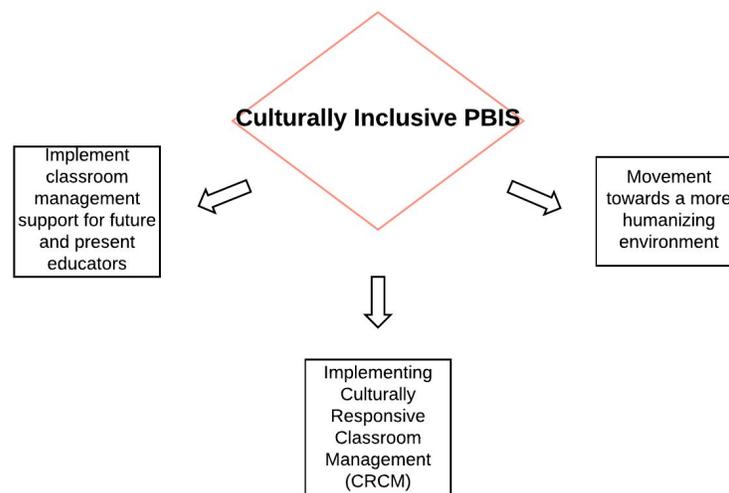

Figure 1. Improvements in PBIS

Implement Classroom Management Support

To help teachers recognize students as individuals, educational training should include classroom management support for future and present educators. Reinke, Hermant and Stormont (2013) claim that "teachers indicate that they consider classroom management to be the most challenging aspect of their job and one in which they receive the least amount of training" (p. 39). It is critical that teachers are experts with creating their own classroom management. Successful classroom management skills have proven to create a positive relationship between teachers and students. According to the literature, it "...develops a classroom social environment in which students agree to cooperate with teachers and fellow students in pursuit of academic growth" (Brown, 2004).

Movement towards a more humanizing environment

Enforcing rewards in school creates the distinction between teachers and students. Students are being trained to follow rules, implicating that there is one way of taking correct actions. However, *Fix school discipline (*2017) claims that differences "...can also increase the divide and subsequent misunderstanding between students and their teachers and administration - even those with similar ethnic backgrounds". In other words, similarities between teachers and student could continue to deny a possibility for a positive relationship.

Implementing Culturally Responsive Classroom Management (CRCM)

Despite the fact that educational settings should provide an equal learning opportunity to all students, studies show that racial discrimination continues to be an issue in schools. *Fix School Discipline(2017)* supports that implicit racial bias is an issue that affects everybody due to our society. In other words, educators will unconsciously partake in racist actions due to societal stereotypes against racial diversity. Sheets and Gay, as stated in Weinstein, Clarke and Curran (2004), claim "Teachers have to care so much about ethnically diverse students and their achievement...". It is important for educators to reevaluate the expectations they have of their students, to prevent discrimination. Furthermore, Weinstein, Curran and Clarke (2003) "recognize that differences in discourse style can have a direct effect on students' behavior". An increase

in culturally responsive classroom management could lead to more successful student/teacher relationships, which will lead to positive behavior.

Conclusion

In an attempt to create an overall positive behavior in educational settings, there is a decrease in incorporating culturally responsive managements for minority students. Molding to students to believe that they will be receive a reward for any appropriate action they complete leads to a loss within their independent decision making. In order to move away from training students to do as they are told at all times, educators should be trained in creating culturally diverse managements skills in the classroom.

Methods

With Positive Behavioural Interventions and Supports Program (PBIS) there is a goal to improve positive behavior in the school environment. In an attempt to be successful all around there is a disconnect between students and teachers. First, teachers may not be getting the training needed to properly and effectively manage a classroom, let alone any behavioral issues that may arise. Second, students are not gaining meaningful connections with their teachers due to their teachers' ineffective classroom management skills. Therefore, the need for teachers to possess effective classroom management skills is imperative for the overall success of teachers, students and PBIS. After interviewing students and teachers from El Caballo elementary, we used the data collected to identify potential areas for improvement of PBIS.

Context

Caballo[1] Elementary is located on the northeast side of Caballo City in California. According to the U.S. Census, as of July 1, 2016, the population within Caballo City was 157, 218 people. In 2011-2015 approximately 37.7% of Caballo City's population was foreign born. The mean percentage for those who have an education equal to or greater than a highschool diploma during 2011-2015 was 59.5%. Caballo Elementary is a school that serves students from grades one through five and is located in

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[1] Pseudonyms have been used for the names of people, places, and organizations.

the outskirts of Caballo City. Caballo Elementary is a relatively new school in comparison to the neighboring elementary schools in Caballo City, it has only been in service for five years. The school first opened during the 2013/2014 school year. It is gated throughout its perimeter and is located in a middle class income community. The school site serves 724 students, 95% of which are Hispanic students. Its relative newness can be seen all over campus. The students' playground has new equipment with not a single hint of chipping in the paint. This sizable playground is where students can play basketball, hopscotch, four square, ride slides or hang upside down on an elaborate geometric playground climber. Students also have the option to play in grass playgrounds with bright green grass and not a single sign of potholes. These two grass playgrounds are a soccer and baseball field where students can play on a more soft and natural terrain.

Building structure wise Caballo Elementary looks new and freshly painted. The classrooms are all neat, clean and organized with new materials such as desks, projectors as well as yoga balls for chairs. At the front of each classroom can be seen a colorful behavior chart with clothespins attached to different colored segments. All students in the classroom have their own clothespin and are expected to place their individual pin on the color which best reflects their behavior throughout the day when instructed to do so. Each classroom will also have a three R's chart as a constant reminder to students that in order to be considered a scholar they must be Responsible, Respectful and Ready at all times.

Participants and Participant Selection

For this capstone project three participants were interviewed. The interviewees consisted of two teachers and two students. The three participants consisted of Mrs. Emmy (a fifth grade teacher), Bella (a fifth grade student), and Spiderman (a fifth grade student).

Mrs. Emmy: Mrs. Emmy is a Hispanic teacher in her mid 30's, she has been teaching sixth grade at Caballo Elementary for one year now. Mrs. Emmy transferred from Hogwarts Elementary where she had been working for 10 years and had first been exposed to PBIS. She is the oldest of three siblings with two younger brothers. Mrs.

Emmy grew up in Grazefield and graduated from Grazefield High School in 2002. She then went on to attend Hogwarts College and graduated in 2004 with her AA degree in General Studies. After Hogwarts, Mrs. Emmy transferred to CSU Mountain View, graduated in 2006 with her bachelor's degree in Liberal Studies and continued there with the multiple subject credential eventually graduating in 2008. Mrs. Emmy began teaching in the Caballo District in 2007 as a second grade teacher.

Bella: Bella is a fifth grade student in Mrs. Emmy's class. Bella was born in Caballo City. Bella is part of a family of four, her mom, her dad and one older brother. Both of Bella's parents are bilingual. Bella is a really motivated young lady and is the ASB (Associated Student Body) Vice President for Caballo Elementary. Everyone from Caballo Elementary can always count on Bella to lend a helping hand to students and teachers.

Spiderman: Spiderman was also born in Caballo City. Spiderman is part of a family of four that is composed of his mom, step-dad, himself and one younger brother. Both of Spider Man's parents (mom and stepdad) are bilingual. Spiderman is a very active boy his mother thinks he might have Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and has voiced her concerns to his teacher. According to Mrs. Emmy, Spiderman is a very smart boy but the only challenge for her is to get him to focus during class time because he becomes distracted very easily yet his strong suit undoubtedly is math.

Researchers: This group of researchers consisted of two Latinx-female Liberal Studies majors from California State University, Monterey Bay (CSUMB). The first researcher, Flor Gomez, is a fifth year Latinx who is in the process of applying for graduate programs in the areas of Mexican American/Chicanx/Latinx Studies. The second researcher, Sylvia Chavez is also a fifth year and currently in the process of applying to teaching credential programs. Both researchers see the imperative need for improvements in PBIS especially in the area of creating meaningful student-teacher relationships as they recognize this is one of the key foundations for effective classroom management. The researchers have first-handedly witnessed many failed attempts of

teachers trying to enforce ineffective classroom management programs. Ineffective programs that are detrimental to a student's overall learning environment and further exacerbate teachers' ineffective classroom management skills.

Experiences that qualify the researchers to carry out this project include being students who have experienced different behavioural incentive programs that aim at disciplining students versus listening to them. The background knowledge they have include knowing that PBIS was originally created for special needs students and that it is now being enforced in schools with a majority of minority students. Personal qualities and skills that qualify the researchers encompass being skilled in the areas of conducting qualitative research. Both researchers are personable, passionate and advocates for individuality, as well as positive social change. What makes the researchers standout from the influentials is that they are looking at PBIS from a third person view without any biases for the program. Due to the passion that the researchers carry in regards to this particular topic both must acknowledge a degree of bias against a system that both perceive to be conditioning versus promoting individuality. As all good researchers do, both researchers have critically analyzed their biases and made all efforts possible to be unbiased throughout the research process in order to effectively analyze the effects of PBIS on children.

Semi-Structured Interview and Survey Questions

1. Tell me about your experiences with PBIS.
2. What are the advantages of implementing PBIS at this school?
3. In what ways has student behavior improved due to PBIS?
4. What do you see as the challenges of PBIS?
5. What are you concerned about when it comes to PBIS?
6. Are there types of behaviors that haven't improved or students who have not responded to PBIS?
7. Are some students not interested in or do some lose interest in scholar dollars ? Why and how does this impact the effectiveness of PBIS at this school?

8. What does "activity time" look like for students who do not earn a membership for PBIS activity day

9. How does PBIS impact student & teacher relationships?

   A. How about student to student relationships?

10. What is currently being done to improve PBIS at this school- by whom - and what do you think about this?

11. What do you think should be done to improve PBIS at this school?

    A. What do you think are the obstacles to improving PBIS?

12. What does it mean to implement PBIS here given the school's demographics?

    A. What are the implications of utilizing PBIS in schools and classrooms primarily serving historically undereducated and marginalized populations?

13. Is there anything else that you would like to say about PBIS and/or the improvement of PBIS?

Procedure

The participants interviewed included teachers and students from Caballo Elementary. The interviews consisted of two interviewers and one interviewee. After being introduced to the teacher they would be working with at their site and spending time in her classroom, the researchers asked her if she would be interested in answering a few questions regarding PBIS as well as her experience with it. The participant was asked to sit down in a classroom and answer the questions the researchers had regarding the program. At the conclusion of the interview, the researchers asked the teacher if she would be willing to further help them on their capstone project by allowing two of her students to undergo similar interview processes. The teacher immediately agreed and provided the researchers with contact information for them to set up a time and date in which they could interview the students. Shortly after, an interview time was set-up and the two students were interviewed separately. Both students were asked similar questions as those asked to the teacher. After all interviews were conducted the interviewers set up one last meeting with the teacher and her students in order to facilitate an activity named

Stressed out Sam.

Data Analysis

After all of the interviews were collected the researchers relistened to the audio files for further analysis. The researchers then began the coding process. After analyzing the background literature as well as the interviews the researchers came across three prominent themes. The three emergent themes were what informed the researchers on possible action projects to help improve PBIS in Caballo Elementary.

Results

For this Capstone Project, teachers and students were interviewed to better understand their thoughts on ways to improve PBIS. Improving PBIS is important because the reward system used makes us question whether students are being controlled and conditioned versus encouraged to grow in a holistic manner. Based on an analysis of the data and the relevant research literature three themes emerged (see Table 1) as possible solutions to improving PBIS. Themes include: preservice and inservice classroom management support, improved teacher-student relationships and teacher engagement in PBIS. Evidence-based decision making required evaluating each potential Action Option by the following criteria: Probability of impact, Time and Sustainability. Based on the evaluation of each Action Option one action will be recommended and justified.

Table 1. Evaluation of Action Options

	Probability of Impact	Time	Sustainability
Improved teacher-student relationships	High	High	High
Teacher engagement in PBIS	High	High	Medium

Pre-service and In-service classroom management support	High	High	Low

Improved teacher-student relationships

      A critical factor for most, if not every relationship is connection. When teachers establish a meaningful connection with their students both parties involved benefit. Developing a connection is going to provide both the teacher and student with a more personal view of one another. A more informal connection will make room for a more comprehensive understanding of one another, this is key. As can be seen in the literature and in *Perpatuating a Culture of White Behavior: The Experiences of Non-Native Speaking Hispanic Students in a PBIS School* (Fraczek, 2010), students perceive that their teachers have the upperhand in all aspects of their schooling. In other words, students feel inferior to their teachers and feel like they have no decision making power as opposed to their teachers,"They see you up here", says Mrs. Emmy (one of our interviewees).

      A possible solution we propose is enhancing student-teacher relationships by providing students with a connection that goes above and beyond academia, one that will create a deeper bond between both (teacher and student). Meaningful connections with students can be fostered through the means of something as simple as an activity. Mrs. Emmy explained that after conducting just one single activity in which students were allowed to open up both her students and herself became closer-"I felt after that, we had a connection. They felt comfortable with me." Activities that make room for students to voice their emotions are the most impactful when it comes to establishing a connection with a student and can help reduce student misbehaviour as can be seen in Mrs. Emmy's quote, "A lot of these kids just want to express whats going on, and if they can't, they'll act out". A good example of an impactful activity and possible partial solution is an activity named Stressed out Sam. The purpose of this activity is to have students: a.) learn

how to voice their stressors, b.) realize that they have similar stressors to others, c.) learn some coping strategies for stress and d.) create a friendly-meaningful environment amongst peers as well as with the teacher.

Teacher Engagement in PBIS

PBIS is a program that calls for the cooperation of both the students and the teachers. Not only must students be engaged with PBIS, but so must teachers. Without the engagement of teachers in PBIS the program can not be a success. Throughout our research at Caballo Elementary we found that teachers seem to not be genuinely interested in engaging with PBIS and doing the whole scholar dollars ordeal. The distress in Mrs. Emmy's voice when describing PBIS says it all, "I'm totally lost, I'm feeling overwhelmed and I'm like I don't even want to do it" or "No time to print out the dollars". According to Mrs. Emmy some of the reasons why teachers were not engaged were because they either a.) got tired of it, b.) found a better solution, c.) were to overwhelmed, or d.) were unfamiliar with the program and never received proper training.

Some potential solutions we propose to help engage teachers in PBIS are to a.) offer PBIS training for all teachers and b.) have new innovative trainings each successive time teachers meet. Through our interviews we discovered that new teachers arriving to Caballo Elementary did not receive the proper training needed to successfully implement PBIS which causes new incoming teachers to not implement it at all. It is no wonder that teachers feel overwhelmed or unfamiliar with PBIS especially when they are told, "Kids will fill you in", instead of actually getting training lessons. Then comes the issue of how engaging these trainings actually are. If trainings are not engaging, teachers will not want to leave their classrooms to attend a boring training which will only further intensify the issue of teachers not knowing how to properly and effectively implement PBIS.

Preservice and In-service Classroom Management Support

As can be seen in the following quote, "The discrepancy in the beliefs of preservice and inservice teachers indicated that teacher education programs should provide a stronger focus on effective classroom management strategies to effectively

redirect students who become disruptive" (Rosas & West, n.d., p.59). That is, there is a need for teacher training programs that will help pre-service, as well as in-service teachers, become effective classroom management responders. The way in which teachers respond to certain classroom management issues can determine what type of relationship the teacher will form with certain students. If a teacher responds ineffectively this might sever any ties that the teacher had with a student. This severing of ties only further exacerbates student-teacher relationships. If the teacher has severed many if not all of his/her student-teacher relationships due to ineffective responses to classroom management this might cause him/her to either create an ineffective learning environment for his/her students or to leave the school all together (Rosas & West, n.d.).

One potential solution we propose for this problem is having credential programs focus on further training of future teachers in the area of classroom management. Credential programs are the perfect time to have future teachers put on the classroom management training wheels, since this is the time when future teachers can fail without any real repercussions. Another potential solution is having the specific schools hiring teachers to provide further classroom management support and trainings throughout a given period. For example, school sites can make classroom management trainings for a new teacher at there school mandatory for three years. The last and most ideal potential solution would be providing future as well as current teachers classroom management trainings where they would be supported until they became effective classroom management responders.

Conclusion

In retrospect, our recommendation for improving PBIS based on the literature and based on our data analysis is **Improving student-teacher Relationships.** Improving their relationship through the means of activities, as proposed earlier can benefit both students and teachers. Positive outcomes for this option include establishing a more meaningful connection with students which can then enhance students feelings of safety and feeling welcomed. This in turn, would have students feel more comfortable opening up and being unique. Thus, when students are in an environment in which they feel appreciated and

heard they are most likely to gain respect for their teachers. An increase in mutual respect between teacher and students can only further foster a productive learning environment as well as an easier classroom to manage.

Limitations for this option include teachers having to invest a significant amount of time getting to know each of their students individually, which can lead to negative impacts on learning time. Teachers might feel like they do not have time to get to know each student individually and might not even try to do so. If teachers do choose it is worth their time and efforts they would have to think about what areas to spend less time on (i.e. instruction, breaks, etc.) in order to focus on this particular topic. Potential negative outcomes for this option may include teachers not following through with getting to know every single student in their classrooms which might help them to get to know just a few students better meanwhile leaving out the rest. Another potential negative outcome might be that teachers choose to take time away from another important topic such as instruction time which could potentially hinder students learning.

Action Documentation and Reflection

The focus issue of this paper was research for social change therefore we, the researchers, interviewed one fifth grade teacher and two fifth grade students from Caballo Elementary to see what areas they thought PBIS needed improvement. The issues with PBIS that emerged through the analysis of our literature as well as our interviews were a need for 1) preservice and inservice classroom management support; 2) improved teacher-student relationships; and 3) teacher engagement in PBIS. Solutions for each of these issues included: 1) having credential programs focus on further classroom management training for future teachers; 2) activities that make room for students to voice their emotions such as an activity named Stressed out Sam; and 3) creating innovative PBIS trainings for teachers each time they meet. The action option we implemented was the activity Stressed out Sam. After evaluating all of our options we chose to implement Stressed out Sam, although the amount of time required is high we believe it would be the most effective because of its high probability of impact and high sustainability.

For this activity we had students sit in a circle and share what stresses them out and why. We also had students share ways in which they cope with stress. As the researchers, we were also part of the activity, not only by facilitating, but by engaging in the activity. The purpose of this activity was to get students to open up to us and vice versa. Opening up would then help foster a sense of community which would feed into a meaningful connection between students and facilitators as well as students and students. For our activity we did the following steps:

1. Gathered students in a circle sitting on chairs.

2. Passed out scratch paper for students to crumble up.

3. We passed around Stressed out Sam and each student took turns putting in their pieces of paper as they said one thing that stressed them out.

4. Once the container was filled up and it came back around to us we paused to ask the students how they thought Sam was feeling and we also asked how they defined stress.

5. Then we passed the container around another time, but this time students took one piece of paper out, as they shared one way they coped with stress.

6.   Once the container empty and it got back around to us, we paused to ask students how Sam might be feeling now and why.

7.   To end the activity we gave a brief explanation as to why we did this activity with them. We also emphasized the importance of being nice to one another.

One of the changes we found ourselves needing to make along the way was passing the container around our circle more than once in order to filled it up and empty it out. We began by giving students the option to "pass" if they were not comfortable sharing. After having a lot of students use the pass option, we found ourselves modifying our second round. We required that all students share at least one stressor or coping strategy in order to make participation fair. We also gave them 10 seconds to talk to their neighbors about some stressors or coping strategies in hopes of gaining greater student participation.

The students' and teacher's response to our activity were all positive. Everyone seemed to have a good time, there were even moments when students shared very personal things. The most surprising thing was how much the students opened up to us even though we were considered outsiders and were not engaging with them on a daily basis. Now we realize that giving students the option to pass without limitations was not the best idea. For example, we saw that a couple of students chose to pass because they thought they were too cool to engage in the activity. Others decided to pass because their neighbor did so they thought it would be funny to pass as well. When facilitating this activity in the future we will require all students to share one thing especially if we give them time to consult with their neighbors because we want to be fair to those who are opening up and sharing. We will also inform them that the only time it is okay to pass is when something might cause them to become over stressed. The next important step that the teacher needs to do is to continue engaging in these activities with her students. Through this single activity we realized how much students are willing and want to open up when they feel safe, comfortable and heard. It is imperative that the teacher continue these activities throughout the academic school year in order to foster and maintain

meaningful student-teacher relationships with her students.

Critical Reflection

Throughout my time conducting this research project, I was able to view things from a third person perspective, which helped me gain insight about myself and about teachers. I have learned that when I speak to a student, I make it clear that they understand I am interested in listening to what they have to say and that I am wanting to learn about their interests. I have also learned that teachers are very limited on time, which means they are responsible deciding how they will manage their class. They must also learn how to balance their academic teaching, which makes it possible to lose sight of the importance of building a relationship with your students. Having had the opportunity to direct the activity "Stressed Out Sam", I was able to learn first hand that some students are faced with a variety of dilemmas. Giving students the opportunity to discuss these topics, also gives them a feeling of trust. This was proven to me after completing the activity. Although I had only been into their classroom as a guest a few times throughout the semester, students were willing and wanting to continue opening up. As a future teacher, I will strive to build communication with all students in order to help build a relationship. It is important that teachers do not lose sight of their students' feelings, even when there is much academic learning to be done. Creating an environment where students feel safe begins with a teacher proving to support them.

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