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Walden University

College of Education

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April Foust

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Walden University
2020

Abstract

Primary Grade Teachers' and Administrators' Perspectives of the Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports Program

by

April Foust

MEd, Kennesaw State University, 2012

BS, Mercer University, 2007

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

December 2020

Abstract

The failure of Positive Behavior Interventions & Supports® (PBIS) to resolve behavior issues among primary grade students at a single charter elementary school in the southeastern United States was the problem that guided this study. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore how primary teachers and administrators identified the need for, implemented, and maintained PBIS to resolve students' behavior problems. Fullan's change theory and Havelock and Zlotolow's change model served as the study's conceptual framework. Research questions addressed how K-3 teachers and administrators determined the need to implement PBIS to resolve students' behavior problems, how they implemented PBIS to resolve those problems, and how K-3 teachers and administrators maintained PBIS to resolve students' behavior problems. Data were collected through semistructured interviews of 10 participants, including 2 administrators and 8 K-3 teachers, and analyzed using hand coding. Most teachers recognized the existence of challenging behavior that preceded the implementation of PBIS and supported the implementation of PBIS at the target school, but encountered barriers that impeded the implementation of PBIS, including confusion over the scope of PBIS, lack of commitment to PBIS, and training in PBIS that many found inadequate. Neither of the administrators noted any barriers, suggesting lack of collaboration with teachers in implementing PBIS. The results of this study may contribute to a positive social change by increasing teachers' and administrators' awareness of the need for collaborative effort in implementing an initiative like PBIS, and may lead to increased collaboration as PBIS continues to be used at the school.

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Dedication

I dedicate this to my husband, Matt, and my beautiful daughters Gabby and Madelyn. You were all there for me through the late nights and long weekends spent researching and writing. I also dedicate this to my mom, who unfortunately passed away prior to the completion of my dissertation. I am grateful for all of the love, encouragement and support show by all of my family and friends. I could not have started and completed this without you all.

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I would like to thank Dr. Anderson, who guided me through this process, celebrated the little millstones along the way, and helped motivate me when I had all but given up. I would like to thank Dr. Yarosz for acting as my committee member and for providing me with guidance during this journey. I would like to thank Dr. Howe, my university reviewer, for her support and suggestions. I would like to acknowledge and thank the many stakeholders for their support and help in this important study.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

According to Bradshaw (2015), Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports® (PBIS) is an example of a proactive approach to behavior management. When applied as intended, it is a school-wide program with three tiers for implementation that have been effective in increasing student achievement and decreasing disruptive behavior (Evanovich & Scott, 2016; Lane, Wehby, Robertson, & Rogers, 2007). In general, the implementation of PBIS in schools has decreased the amount of instructional time spent dealing with discipline and with disruptive students (Freeman et al., 2016). However, in the school that is the focus of this study, PBIS has not yet achieved these outcomes in grades K-3 after nearly 3 years of implementation and the reason for this lack of success is unclear. Since implementation of PBIS depends in large part on classroom teachers and support from administration, primary grade teachers and administrators of enrolled children at the target school may be able to provide insight into the aspects of PBIS implementation that supported or hindered efforts to manage children's behavior.

In this first chapter, I present a brief summary of literature relevant to the target issue, a statement of the problem and purpose of the study and the guiding research questions, key definitions, and anticipated limitations and assumptions that may have affected the study's outcome. I finish this chapter with a statement of the significance this study may have for promoting positive social change.

Background

PBIS is a culturally responsive behavior management system that can be used to reduce discrepancies in behavior referrals and curtail discipline problems (Stormont,

Rodriguez, & Reinke, 2016). School-wide PBIS is used by educators to collect data which can be used to ensure that the behavior interventions are both meaningful and culturally responsive (Freeman et al., 2016). Behavior interventions are more likely to be successful when the student's perceived motivation is identified. PBIS provides intervention strategies for teachers to use with students who are exhibiting negative behavior with specific perceived motivations. When developing behavior interventions, it is important to identify social and academic skill deficits in students that may contribute to negative behaviors. After these deficits have been identified, an appropriate intervention can be developed to meet the needs of the student (Stormont et al., 2016).

PBIS can be used to address behavioral and academic concerns and how environment can affect both. PBIS is intended to change the way that teachers interact with their students (Stormont et al, 2016). Consistency and buy-in are key to the success of a PBIS program. With PBIS, a common list of expectations for behavior also lead to the success of the program. PBIS uses both data collection and progress monitoring to help develop a plan for lasting change in the school culture (Bradshaw, 2013). The teachers are trained on bullying prevention and positive behavior recognition. To limit the amount of class time spent on discipline, referrals are made electronically at the end of class. This allows teachers to maximize learning time (Banks & Obiakor, 2015).

Although teachers may impose consequences for misbehavior, according to Leach and Helf (2016) consequences should be aligned with PBIS. In the PBIS system, punitive consequences are assumed to not result in a decrease of the problem behavior in the future, because punitive consequences do not resolve the cause of the negative behavior.

Punishment instead takes away from instructional time while punishing the offender (Leach & Helf, 2016). In schools where punitive discipline is used, there is often a lack of support for the PBIS framework (Tyre & Feuerborn, 2017). Lack of staff support may also be due to misconceptions about PBIS caused by limited professional development (Tyre & Feuerborn, 2017). In addition, paraprofessionals and other support personnel have been found to be far less likely to accept PBIS than were teachers, resulting in uneven application of discipline measures (Filter, Sytsma, & McIntosh, 2016).

In contrast to discipline systems reliant on punishment, the data driven supports used in PBIS provide teachers and administrators with detailed office discipline referral (ODR) documents and enable educators to see when and where challenging behavior occurs, and the possible motivation for this behavior (George, Cox, Minch & Sandomierski, 2018). These data can be used to determine whether a student needs additional behavior support or referral for further evaluation (Banks & Obiakor, 2015). Although studies like those of Cressey, Whitcomb, McGilvrary-Rivet, Morrison, and Shander Reynolds (2015) and Andreou, McIntosh, Ross, and Kahn (2015) offered improvements or variations on PBIS, no one has yet conducted a study of teachers' and administrators' perspectives of implementation of PBIS in a district in which PBIS has failed to work as expected. This study fills this gap in the literature and the associated gap in the practice of PBIS implementation and student behavior management and may provide insights by which to further improve behavior management and promote student learning.

Problem Statement

In a suburban charter elementary school outside a major metropolitan area in the southeastern United States, the PBIS program has not had the expected positive effect in reducing the number of student referrals for prohibited behaviors. The purpose of implementing classroom behavior interventions is to enhance prosocial behavior and increase student academic engagement while decreasing negative behaviors which interrupt instructional time (Emmer & Sabornie, 2015). Research suggested that PBIS can reduce student negative office referrals and out-of-school suspensions (Houchens et al., 2017). Despite the success PBIS has achieved across the country in reducing behavior referrals, the number of discipline referrals in Grades K to 3 at the school that was the focus of this study did not decrease.

According to the principal at the school that was the location of this study (Personal Communication, 22 September, 2017), in the 2017-2018 school year 134 referrals for prohibited behaviors were made for students in kindergarten through Grade 3, compared to 282 in the previous year and 127 in the 2014-2015 school year, the year prior to the implementation of PBIS. This failure of PBIS at this school in the primary grades represents a gap in practice that had not been addressed and that has had negative implications for students at the school.

The failure of PBIS may have been associated with factors identified in prior research as essential to PBIS implementation. For example, Cooper and Scott (2017) found that classrooms with positively stated rules and expectations had a high success rate with their behavior management implementation. Bethune (2017) discussed the role

of the PBIS coach in facilitating interventions and supports. The PBIS model uses coaching through observation of behaviors and feedback by the PBIS coach to support teachers and staff in their use of PBIS. Bethune (2017) found that having support from the administration is essential to the successful implementation of PBIS. The benefits of PBIS on various outcomes have been examined and documented in multiple studies and by different research teams. Cressey et al. (2015) conducted a case study which describes the successful implementation of PBIS by a school counselor. The failure of PBIS to resolve behavior issues among primary grade students at the target school was the problem that guided this study. This study contributes to the body of knowledge needed to address this problem because teacher and administrator perspectives of possible causes of PBIS failure were explored and identified.

Purpose

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore how primary teachers and administrators identified the need for, implemented, and maintained PBIS to resolve students' behavior problems. By exploring teachers' and administrators' perspectives of barriers and obstacles experienced during the implementation of PBIS, I hoped to discover both what interfered with the implementation at this school and what might have reduced barriers and eliminated obstacles.

Research Questions

Three research questions guided this study. The questions were derived from the problem statement and were grounded by the conceptual framework.

RQ1: How did K-3 teachers and administrators determine the need to implement PBIS to resolve students' behavior problems?

RQ2: How do K-3 teachers and administrators implement PBIS to resolve students' behavior problems?

RQ3: How do K-3 teachers and administrators maintain PBIS to resolve students' behavior problems?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework that grounded this study was based on Fullan's ideas surrounding the implementation of educational change. According to Fullan (2006), to implement change, attention must be paid to teacher motivation. Fullan (2008) asserted first that teachers must be motivated to implement a mandate, an initiative, or an innovation; and second that teachers need information about specific and clearly defined behaviors and practices needed to implement the change. Without teacher motivation and understanding, a proposed innovation will fail. Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991) explored the role of the change agent, noting that by "employing principles of social change, including the setting up of peer support systems, consultants (whether internal or external) can reach and respond to more people more effectively" (p. 226). The process of organizational change is based on the idea that people can adopt behaviors that they observe and that they are most likely to adopt behaviors that people around them value (Bandura, 1977).

Havelock and Zlotolow (1995) described the process by which an individual adopter moves through a series of decision phases referred to as the innovation adoption

process. They explained that innovation is diffused throughout a social system and this diffusion process is experienced by the adopter. During the first phase, an individual develops an awareness of the innovation. This phase is followed by increased interest in the innovation with the individual seeking out more information about the new idea. The third phase is evaluation, during which time a decision is made whether to adopt or reject the innovation. The fourth phase is trial of the innovation by the adopter, followed by the final phase, adoption of the innovation. At any time during these phases, an individual may decide to reject the innovation. Similar to Fullan (2008), Havelock and Zlotolow associated the success of an organizational innovation with motivation and understanding developed in the person who must enact the change.

Since the implementation of PBIS represented a change at the school in question, Havelock and Zlotolow's (1995) ideas, along with the ideas of Fullan (2006), were relevant to this study and inform the research questions that guided it. The first research question established a baseline for the relevance and magnitude of the perceived behavior problems at the target school. Havelock and Zlotolow suggested that such educator perspectives are important in the decision to accept or reject an innovation. The second research question, about how teachers and administrators resolved students' behavior problems, was derived from the need for information and understanding, cited by both Fullan and Havelock and Zlotolow. This second research question helped establish whether educators understood that PBIS could supply key resources and be helpful to them in resolving K-3 children's challenging behavior. The third research question, about how teachers and administrators maintained PBIS following initial implementation,

addressed ongoing efforts to apply PBIS to students' behavior problems. Responses to this question helped identify at which phase described by Havelock and Zlotolow the implementation of PBIS failed in securing the support of teachers and helped determine if the problem had been resolved over time.

Researchers have shown that teacher buy-in of the PBIS approach contributed to whether teachers fulfilled their program responsibilities with fidelity (Bambara, Goh, Kern, & Caskie, 2012). Tillery, Varjas, Meyers, and Collins (2010) found that when teachers lacked competence in carrying out PBIS program strategies, the probability of returning to preexisting classroom management systems increased. The ideas of these theorists suggest a focus on teacher motivation for the implementation of PBIS, social support for the implementation, and support for the process of implementation, from first trial of the program through its adoption. Because classroom teachers and administrators may have different perspectives on efforts to develop teacher motivation and provide information and social support, in my study I interviewed representatives of both groups.

Nature of the Study

In this study, I examined the failure of an implementation of PBIS at one charter school in the southeastern United States to reduce the number of discipline referrals of K-3 students. The study was designed to determine K-3 teachers' and administrators' perspectives surrounding implementation of PBIS at the target school. In conducting this study, I followed traditions of phenomenology, as described by Creswell (2013), in that I examined the shared experience of the phenomenon of PBIS implementation by teachers and administrators.

This study followed a basic qualitative design using participant interviews. This design was selected because this study concentrated on personal perspectives. Merriam (2002) suggested qualitative researchers seek to understand the meaning and perspectives individuals develop as they interact in the real world. Qualitative research focuses on how people interpret their experiences in a situation and how these experiences contribute to the meaning of the phenomenon (Merriam, 2002). Because this study concentrated on personal perspectives, a qualitative design was the most practical design to answer my research questions.

This study was conducted in an urban charter elementary that employed 33 teachers and two administrators. This study focused on grades kindergarten through third grade, in which about 240 children were enrolled each year at this school. The participants were selected through purposeful sampling, in that one teacher per grade level kindergarten through third grade (four teachers total), one K-3 special education teacher, two support teachers who serve K-3 children, and one guidance counselor were invited to participate, for a total of eight participant teachers. In addition, all administrators with responsibilities affecting grades K-3 were invited to participate in the same interview process, resulting in a total of 10 interviews.

The information obtained from these teachers and administrators was collected through interviews and analyzed through open coding. This study added to previous knowledge about stakeholders’ perspectives concerning PBIS and may have led to the development of better supports with which to prepare elementary teachers to successfully implement PBIS. How this information was obtained is described in the next section.

Definition of Terms

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS): An approach that seeks to enhance students' academic and behavior outcomes by guiding "school personnel in adopting and organizing evidence-based behavioral interventions" (Behavior Research Center, 2011, p. 1).

Referrals or office disciplinary referrals (ODRs): Documented incidents of problem behavior that require administrative involvement (McIntosh, Frank, & Spalding, 2010).

Assumptions

I assumed that teachers and administrators were truthful and complete in their answers. Because this study's results were based on what participants say, it was essential that their answers reflected their true perspectives. I supported participants' truthfulness by ensuring responses were kept confidential. In addition, I assumed that the school maintained accurate discipline records for all students in kindergarten through third grade, since the basis for this study was that PBIS failed to reduce the number of discipline problems in K-3 classrooms. If these records were inaccurate, so that PBIS was more successful than the records purport, the rationale for this study would be eroded. Because there was no apparent reason why discipline referrals would be overstated, resulting in a failure assessment of PBIS, I made this assumption with some confidence. These assumptions leave my study open to challenge, should it be revealed in the future that educators' perspectives or discipline records were unreliable.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study was teacher and administrator perspectives of an implementation of PBIS in K-3 classrooms at one school in the southeastern United States. This specific focus was chosen because discipline referrals at this school had increased following implementation of PBIS, which was a result not supported by the literature.

This study was delimited to include eight K-3 teachers and two associated administrators from a single charter school in the southeastern United States, who were employed at the school during the time that PBIS was adopted and implemented. Excluded from this study were teachers in Grades 4 and 5 and K-3 teachers who were not part of the adoption and implementation effort. Also excluded were teachers from other schools in the district, and support staff at the target school, such as teacher aides. The small number of participants hindered transferability, but the findings of this basic qualitative study may have yielded implications for further study based on the depth of the interview data and the results of my analysis (see Creswell, 2013). I provided a detailed and complete description of the context in which this study took place, allowing the reader to transfer these findings to similar contexts. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that similar contexts offer the success in transferability and it is the responsibility of a researcher duplicating the study to determine this based on the details presented in the original study.

The conceptual framework of this study was based in ideas of organizational change, and particularly the role of change agent motivation and perceived support for

making a proposed change. This framework was appropriate for this study, given that I intended to explore the perspectives of teachers and administrators, acting as change agents, in implementing PBIS. Other frameworks that I might have chosen include a focus on student motivation for behavior and behavior change (e.g., behaviorism, social learning theory), to discover why PBIS was ineffective in reducing behavior referrals at the school, or on organizational systems (e.g., organizational culture theory), to discover what in the school organization might have contributed to the failure of PBIS. Such frameworks might support follow-up studies. For this study, in which the purpose was to explore how primary teachers and administrators identified the need for, implemented, and maintained PBIS to resolve students' behavior problems, ideas of organizational change with respect to change agent implementation of change form an appropriate framework.

Limitations

One limitation of this study was its small sample size of 10 participants. This limitation was a factor of the size of the school, which was comprised of 21 teachers of primary grade students and three administrators, and the fact that this single school experienced the failure of PBIS that is the focus of this study. In addition, a small number of participants enabled deep, rich interview conversations, and therefore detailed data to inform this study (Creswell, 2013). According to Merriam and Tisdell (2015), an interview-based study may be conducted with as few as eight participants, and this is especially true when a single site is the target of inquiry.

In addition, the use of a charter school in this study may have limited the transferability of the findings to other types of schools. Charter schools receive public funding, like district schools, but are not governed by the district school board. Therefore, policies and processes, especially regarding teacher development, discipline, and record keeping, may have been be unique to this school and may limit the transferability of findings to other schools. Because failure of PBIS in public school settings had not been reported in the literature, this school offered a unique opportunity to study this phenomenon, irrespective of its charter school status. Despite this limitation, this study provided valuable insights for administrators in more conventional school settings.

Finally, this study contained a limitation inherent in qualitative research, that of researcher bias. As the instrument for data collection, I served as a filter and interpreter of data, and so my own perspectives may have affected how I conducted the interviews, what material I chose to include in the data analysis, and the conclusions I drew from this analysis. To reduce the effect of researcher's bias, Johnson (1997) recommended the implementation of the reflexivity strategy. Reflexivity is a practice by which the researcher examines biases and conducts critical self-evaluation of personality that might influence the research process and outcome. I used a researcher journal and identified any bias regarding PBIS or educators' perspectives. To minimize the effects my perspectives had on the data, I monitored the data collection process by executing continual self-evaluations in the reflexive process. These factors may limit the transferability of the study, but the issues raised here may be informative for teachers and administrators challenged by behavior problems of K-3 students.

Significance

Teachers and administrators recognize the importance of behavior management (Bethune, 2017), so the introduction of PBIS at the target school likely supported existing behavior management values among the school staff. Despite reasonable expectations for the success of PBIS found in the research literature, this success had not yet materialized at the target school after nearly 3 years of effort, suggesting that barriers or obstacles have interfered with implementation of the program. This study has potential to contribute significantly to understanding of PBIS implementation and the implementation of educational change generally, by exploring educators' perspectives on PBIS implementation in a school in which PBIS failed to reduce student behavior referrals.

The results of this study may lead to positive social change by identifying what teachers and administrators believe they need to implement an educational change like adoption of PBIS. This information may assist in implementation of future educational initiatives, to the benefit of educators generally and students in particular. In addition, positive social change may result from this study in that it may a reveal supports and barriers at work in the failed PBIS implementation, and so indicate ways by which a renewed PBIS implementation might be undertaken with greater success. Given the positive results of PBIS for students in other schools, resulting in improved behavior, positive school culture, and a supportive classroom learning environment, another implementation of PBIS, informed by this study's results, may result in school success for children at the target school.

Summary

This dissertation is organized and presented in five chapters. Chapter 1 provided an overview of the concept of PBIS and the related research problem. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore primary grade teachers' and administrators' perspectives of PBIS implementation at the target school, and what resources they described as important in supporting efforts to resolve children's challenging behavior, as well as what barriers they described as factors that have hindered efforts to resolve children's challenging. The research questions, and commonly used research terms as well as the significance of the study were addressed. The conceptual framework for this study included Fullan's (2006) change theory and Havelock and Zlotolow's (1995) change model. The study included K-3 teachers and administrators at a charter school in the southeastern United States and focused on perspectives on the implementation of PBIS. In Chapter 2, a review of current peer-reviewed literature supporting the need for the study is presented.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The failure of PBIS to resolve behavior issues among primary grade students at the target school is the problem that guided this study. PBIS is a research-based method of behavior management that is based on cognitive behaviorism, a blending of ideas from both behaviorism and cognitive therapy (Caldarella, et al., 2017). PBIS is a school wide program with three tiers for implementation that has been effective in increasing student achievement and decreasing disruptive behavior (Lane et al., 2007). Although Cressey et al. (2015) described adjustments to PBIS to facilitate scaling up the program to encompass an entire school, and Bethune (2017) found classroom-level actions that increased or decreased the effectiveness of PBIS, no study has described PBIS failure and the factors that might lead to this result.

This review starts with a description of how I searched for relevant literature and a discussion of the conceptual framework which guided the study. In the remainder of this review, I present literature on student behavior in early childhood settings, discipline strategies for young children, the PBIS framework, and the implementation of PBIS with K-3 students. Finally, I present literature on implementing educational change, in alignment with the conceptual framework for this study.

Literature Search Strategy

I conducted an extensive literature review to synthesize information from current research related to this study. Studies and articles that were published in journals, dissertations, national databases, and the publications of professional organizations were reviewed. I conducted detailed searches of the Walden University Library research

databases including EBSCOhost databases, ProQuest, Academic Search Complete, PsycINFO, Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection and Education Source. Focus was placed on finding research within the past 5 years. These databases were consulted for evidence that the implementation of PBIS reduces negative behaviors in kindergarten through third grade students. However, because little research on PBIS has been conducted within the past 5years, I included in my study sources older than 5 years that contributed important information for my study. Initial search terms used in locating literature included *PBIS, positive behavior interventions, school discipline in K-3,* and *behavior interventions and supports*. I applied an iterative process, in which these initial search terms led me to search of terms such as *PBIS failure, PBIS implementation, PBIS stakeholders, perceptions on PBIS,* and *PBIS background*. I also searched the literature about the conceptual framework, using these search terms: *Fullan, change theory* and *change agent.* In this review I examined current peer-reviewed journal articles, as well as books and educational publications.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study of a failed educational change included Fullan's (2006) change theory and Havelock and Zlotolow's (1995) phases of innovation adoption. According to Fullan, change is a process that requires teacher motivation, the building of capacity, an institutionalized mechanism for reflection on the change process, and engagement of all stakeholders, along with individual persistence and flexibility; these must be in place before the change initiative begins (Fullan, 2006). Fullan emphasized that effectiveness of school communities depends on whether they involve

their teachers in the process of advancing learning or whether these communities avoid methods that do not attain results. He wrote that efforts to find solutions to current problems must include those people who are most closely involved in the problem and whose efforts will be needed to affect the solution (Fullan, 2008).

According to Fullan (2006), systemic change is complex, and it is easy for teachers to fixate on a simplified interpretation of an initiative without addressing intended its goals or making behavioral changes. Commitment and motivation result from shared ownership, which increases an individual's ability to both accept a change and to seek more responsibility for implementing the change, thus building individual capacity for growth (Fullan, 2014). Fullan's (2007) change model focused on three phases. The first phase, initiation, includes any actions that promote a decision to adopt or move forward with a change (Fullan, 2007). The second phase, implementation involves the attempts to put the change or new idea into practice, while the final phase, institutionalization, occurs when the change becomes an ongoing part of the system (Fullan, 2007). Fullan further claimed that this theory of change can be vital in informing educational reform strategies and in obtaining positive results.

Havelock and Zlotolow's (1995) model of change is similar to Fullan's but identifies specific decision-points encountered by individuals in the midst of change. Havelock and Zlotolow (1995) offered an acronym, CREATER, as an expression of these decision-points, in which CREATER stands for *care, relate, examine, acquire, try, extend* and *renew*. According to their model, an individual amid change must first care about the change issue, and be able to relate to the problem, then must be willing to

examine their role in both the problem and the change effort, to acquire new skills and to try these in practice, and finally to extend the change effort beyond the original confines of the problem and to renew their own perspectives as an agent of change. According to Havelock and Zlotolow, the foundation of the CREATER model is Lewin's (1947) Unfreeze-Move-Refreeze model. The Unfreeze-Move-Refreeze model begins by preparing the organization for possible of change, executing the change and providing participants with resources to support the change and finally fine-tuning the change based on feedback (Lewin, 1947). The decision points included in the CREATER model supplement Fullan's theory.

With the constant need for change existing across a multitude of organizations, research continues to emerge in many fields addressing different components of the change process (Legg, Snelgrove, & Wood, 2016). Change theory has been used as the framework of previous studies regarding student discipline (Jolstead et al., 2017, Freeman et al., 2016, Bess 2015). Fullan's (2007) theoretical framework on the change process to be used as a lens to understand the implementation of PBIS. Teachers have limited time and opportunity to generate change and therefore must be motivated, and their capacity to implement the change must be developed. Fullan's theory of change, specifically as it relates to the individual teacher, helped to frame this study to examine the perspectives of K-3 teachers and administrators as they implement PBIS.

These topics are included in the following review of current literature, starting with a discussion of student behavior in the early childhood years. Prior research has been conducted primarily using large scale quantitative studies which show the successes

of using PBIS in the classroom but did not address individual perspectives on the implementation of PBIS. Horner and Sugai (2015) discussed the success of PBIS in reducing discipline referrals a broad range of classrooms but did not address teacher perspectives. Feuerborn, Tyre, and Beaudoin (2018) conducted research on the successful implementation of PBIS but indicated that suggested further research was needed to address individual perspectives on implementation.

Challenging Behavior in Early Childhood Education Settings

Erikson (1965) proposed the theory that children go through a series of developmental stages, each with its own specific tasks. Elementary school children begin to develop skills to help them to control impulses and to behave in acceptable ways in school. The basic premise traditionally has been that challenging behaviors should be addressed when children are young. According to Evanovich and Scott (2016), approximately 20% of a school's student body is involved in some type of negative behavior. These behaviors may include students limited attention, physical or verbal aggression, noncompliance, and vandalism among other things (Betters-Bubon, Brunner & Kansteiner. 2016). Many teachers have reported that behavioral management has become a major issue in the classroom (Bethune, 2017).

Behavioral or emotional problems occur frequently in lower elementary grades as young students are building social skills. In fact, the prevalence of early elementary students exhibiting problem behaviors has been found to be between 7% and 10%, (Caldarella, Williams, Hansen, & Wills, 2015). Ramey (2015) found that young children are less likely than older students to engage in more serious negative behaviors. One

However, national estimates suggest that over 2% of elementary school students were suspended in the 2011-2012 school year (US. Department of Education, 2014). This approach to behavioral problems has not shown positive results. Ramey (2015) found that schools with suspension statistics may have fewer available resources for alternative discipline methods and teachers who have not been adequately trained in effective classroom management. In addition, Ramey found that, because suspension or expulsion changes a child's normal routine, it can cause them to fall behind in school which may lead to an increase in negative behaviors. Ramey suggested that suspension and expulsion are symptomatic of deeper issues in a school and lead to deeper issues for affected students.

Feuerborn et al. (2018) stated that teachers find negative and disengaged classroom behaviors to be prevalent and difficult to manage. Lack of a successful approach to dealing with the underlying basis for the behavior causes these behaviors to continue. According to Freeman et al. (2015), most prior research has focused on identifying risk factors for negative behavior but has not provided support in intervention approaches. According to Childs, Kincaid, George, and Gage (2016) common classroom management techniques in response to challenging behavior include verbal praise, direct commands, and consistent consequences. These practices should be developmentally appropriate, worded and stated positively, taught explicitly (McDaniel, Sunyoung, & Guyotte, 2017). In fact, according to Madigan, Cross, Smolkowski, and Strycker (2016), school systems that implement school-wide practices behavior management techniques

that are consistent, positive, and developmentally appropriate are much more likely to have lower discipline rates than schools without those practices.

Discipline Strategies for Early Childhood Behavior Problems

Behavior problems are commonplace in early childhood classrooms (Feuerborn et al., 2018), and several strategies are routinely employed by teachers in kindergarten through third grade. For example, as a way of preventing disruptions, some educators have moved from responding to difficult behaviors with unwanted consequences to teaching positive behavior (Skiba & Losen, 2015). Other educators use time-outs and the in-school suspensions for disruptive behaviors (Algozzine, Wang, & Wang, 2017). According to Leach and Helf (2016), an important component of behavior management that helps to eliminate misbehavior and promote positive behavior involves providing structure, by having strong expectations, rules and consequences that are fair, consistent routines and procedures, and teacher-centered activities.

According to Childs et al. (2016), when implementing a discipline plan for a school, it is important to note that ineffective discipline does not modify behavioral patterns and might result in the development of more unwanted behaviors. Positive behavior should be taught in schools with the same approach as academic content, so students understand expected behaviors (Simonsen et al. 2019). In a study conducted by Childs et al., ineffectual student discipline during early childhood through elementary grades was correlated with scholastic underachievement and missed opportunities for academic, social, and emotional growth. According to Leach and Helf (2016), punitive consequences do not result in a decrease of the problem behavior in the future. In

addition, punitive consequences do not find the cause of the negative behavior, but instead take away from instructional time while punishing the offender. Punitive strategies dealing with student behavior, such as suspension and expulsion, are unlikely to remediate disruptive behavior. In fact, these strategies may increase the likelihood of the disruptive behavior continuing (Cooper & Scott, 2017).

Zero-tolerance discipline practices have been so prevalent that children as young as three have been suspended from their prekindergarten classrooms (Myers, Freeman, Simonsen, & Sugai, 2017). Time-outs and the in-school suspensions are an option to students being excluded from the classroom environment for disruptive behaviors while still allowing students the opportunity to remain in school. However, these discipline strategies rarely lead to lasting changes in student behavior (Algozzine et al., 2017). Fields (2014) studied an intervention method for behavior issues to reduce suspension and expulsion rates by conducting two studies: one with 50 children aged three to six and another with 20 children in first and second grade. Fields found that when teachers redirected behavior with positive acknowledgements, the number of behavior issues dropped. Mowen and Brent (2016) suggested that in general school contexts, not specifically in the primary grades, suspension or expulsion may lead to increases in child aggression, so that other methods of dealing with challenging behavior are warranted.

As a way of preventing disruptions, educators in recent years have moved from responding to difficult behaviors with aversive consequences to teaching positive behavior (Childs et al., 2016). To control student behavior, many schools have become proactive in giving teachers the necessary tools to prevent negative behavior, and how to

model appropriate behavior to students (Skiba & Losen, 2015). In addition, it is important that the school discipline plan be made clear to the students and faculty and that is regularly vocalized within the school community (Green et al., 2015). According to Tadic (2015), involving students in the process allowed them to understand the mistakes that were made and to reflect on ways to improve their behavior. Methods that encourage development of reflection and self-discipline among students and staff are more effective than aversive techniques.

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports

During the 1980s, education researchers at the University of Oregon identified the need for effective behavioral interventions for students with behavior disorders. The researchers indicated that efforts should be directed toward prevention of disruptive behavior as opposed to punitive measures (Horner & Sugai, 2015). Researchers went on to develop a program for all students, using research-based practices, databased decision making, schoolwide systems, clear social skills instruction, team-based implementation and professional development, and evaluations of student outcomes now known as PBIS (Caldarella et al., 2016; Horner & Sugai, 2015). PBIS is a preemptive methodology to establish behavioral reinforcements and social culture needed for all students in a school to achieve emotional, academic, and social success (Caldarella et al., 2016).

Horner and Sugai (2015) reported that approximately 20,000 schools in the United States have implemented PBIS. Turri et al. (2016) found that the use of schoolwide expectations for behavior, specifically PBIS, creates a more predictable, positive, and consistent school environment. PBIS is an approach that proactively

addresses behavioral challenges, includes data-based accountability, and focuses on teaching appropriate behaviors (Bradshaw, Waasdorp, & Leaf, 2015). PBIS is implemented in three tiers, which include universal, targeted, and intensive levels of behavior support (Horner & Sugai, 2015). All students receive universal Tier 1 supports. However, approximately 15% of students do not respond to Tier 1 supports alone and will require additional, targeted Tier 2 intervention (Horner & Sugai, 2015). Of these students, approximately 5% will need additional intensive supports such as a behavior management plan or wrap-around services (Horner & Sugai, 2015).

According to the U. S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP; 2017), there are two parts to the implementation of PBIS. First, implementation begins within a multitiered support system and must contain measurable outcomes, evidence-based practice systems, and data for decision making. Second, regular self-assessment and action planning are important to determine the status of factors or drivers associated with systemic implementation of the PBIS framework. The results of self-assessment may be used to develop and modify action plans designed to achieve local capacity for establishing and sustaining high fidelity implementation of the PBIS framework (OSEP, 2017).

Researchers (Caldarella et al., 2016; Childs et al., 2016) showed PBIS to be an effective alternative to traditional punitive approaches to negative behavior. Bradshaw et al. (2015) stated that research supports the use of PBIS as an effective strategy for generating positive behavior outcomes for students at varying risk levels. Caldarella et al. (2016) studied success in preventing or eliminating challenging behaviors by teaching

and reinforcing appropriate social skills. They found that using these strategies decreased negative behaviors in the classroom. Floress and Jacoby (2017) stated that prekindergarten students decreased challenging behavior and increased social-emotional skills when teachers implemented PBIS. Turri et al. (2016) found that the use of strategies based on extrinsic and intrinsic rewards, such as is the case in PBIS, can have a greater influence on students than punitive strategies.

According to Yoon (2016), data driven supports used in PBIS allow teachers and administrators to attend to office discipline referrals and to see when and where behavior that triggers removal from the classroom occurs and the possible motivation of children in exhibiting such behavior. These data can be used to determine whether a student needs additional behavior support or referral for further evaluation. Behavior risk can be examined using behavior rating scales to determine risk for noncompliance with classroom rules. Yoon found that the results from the behavior screening were predictive of behavior problems. This predictive value of behavior screening suggests that teachers who use systems like PBIS can take a proactive approach and implement behavior interventions early (Burke et al., 2016).

PBIS implementation involves the commitment of several stakeholders, such as teachers, administrators, parents, and students (Feuerborn et al., 2015). Garbacz et al. (2016) found that stakeholder input is necessary for an equitable implementation of PBIS. However, PBIS does not have a framework for involving families, but relies on one-way communication strategies by teachers in PBIS schools to provide families with information about their child’s behavior; PBIS does not include the parent as part of the

support process. The success of PBIS could be augmented, according to Garbacz et al. (2016), by including them on the PBIS leadership team and encouraging them to use the same strategies at home. Houchens et al. (2017) analyzed teacher perceptions of their working conditions in schools implementing PBIS and schools not implementing PBIS. Teachers in schools implementing PBIS reported higher levels of student and faculty understanding of behavioral expectations and a stronger atmosphere of professional trust and respect (Houchens et al., 2017). Feuerborn et al. (2015) suggested further research was needed that is related to how staff perceptions may change over the course of the implementation of PBIS.

PBIS.org, the official website for PBIS implementation, is funded by OSEP and its Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. Tools for the implementation of PBIS can be found on the PBIS website at no charge. However, there is no current literature on PBIS failure. In a Google Scholar search for PBIS in from 2014-2019, there were a total of 25 relevant results with six involving high school students, two involving middle school students, nine involving elementary school students, and eight that included a range of students across K-12 settings. Of these articles, 19 provided positive results involving PBIS implementation and four provided inconclusive results. No negative reports on the implementation of PBIS were found. This reinforces the anomalous nature of the failure of PBIS in this study's target school and supports the intention of this study to explore the perspectives of educators regarding the way PBIS was implemented and supported at the school.

Implementation of PBIS in K-3 Classrooms

When applied as intended, PBIS is a school-wide program with three tiers for implementation that have been proven effective in increasing student achievement and decreasing disruptive behavior (Evanovich & Scott, 2016). Ogulmus and Vuran (2016) found that implementing PBIS had a significant effect on improving problem student behavior, school climate, and student outcomes in elementary schools. In general, the implementation of PBIS in schools has decreased the amount of instructional time spent dealing with discipline and with disruptive students (Freeman et al., 2016). For example, Stanton-Chapman, Walker, Voorhees, and Snell (2016) described the successful implementation of PBIS in a Head Start program. They found that the three-tier PBIS model was useful in improving teachers' ability to manage problem behavior by improving overall classroom behavior and teaching social skills. These authors concluded that PBIS provides a hierarchy of supportive consequences sufficient to effectively address preschool behavior challenges.

PBIS has been shown to increase on-task behavior both in preschool and primary grade classrooms (Jolstead et. al., 2017). Kamps et al. (2015) studied PBIS in six elementary classrooms in three different schools. During the implementation of PBIS, on-task behavior by students and positive reinforcement from teachers increased, while disruptive behavior and negative reinforcement decreased. Caldarella et al. (2015) studied classroom PBIS implementation in five kindergarten through second-grade classrooms and that the results were not unlike the findings of previous studies. A Google Scholar search on July 1, 2019 for articles on PBIS (2014-2019) in the United States produced 25

results. Of these results only nine involved elementary students and all reported only positive results. Although one conference presentation purported to describe a PBIS failure (Baldy, Bennett, & Guion, 2017), the presentation is unpublished.

Despite research supporting the usefulness of PBIS for preschool and elementary-grade children, K-3 results from PBIS implementation at the school that is the location of this study indicated an unexpected lack of success. As noted in Chapter 1, the principal at the school reported that the number behavior referrals for K-3 students in the two years following PBIS implementation was greater than the number of behavior referrals in the year prior to PBIS implementation. Therefore, in this study I explored primary teachers' and administrators' perspectives of PBIS implementation at the target school and ways their efforts to guide children's behavior were supported or hindered by the implementation of PBIS. These perspectives are related to best practices in implementing educational change.

Implementing Educational Change

A common theme from the research in successful implementation of educational change includes the importance of human factors in facilitating the change process (Bess, 2015; Deschamps, Rinfret, Lagace, & Prive, 2016; Legg et al., 2016). According to Caldarella et al. (2015), leaders should understand the perspective of participants involved in change and encourage their input in determining best practices. The involvement of staff in the change process can create a sense of ownership and pride in the successful implementation of the process (Swain-Bradway et al., 2015). According to Inandi and Gilic (2016), it is impossible to successfully implement a proposed change

without considering the teachers' thoughts and attitudes. To influence the successful implementation of educational change, teachers must be active participants, and must be treated as though their opinions and actions matter. However, in the absence of opportunities for active participation and influence, teacher agency is reduced (Vähäsantanen, 2015).

Briggs, Russell, and Wanless (2018) highlighted the crucial role of teachers in the successful implementation of educational change. However, they found that the extent to which a teacher feels committed to a proposed change may differ based on their individual perspectives of the change. Teachers' past life experience and feelings about their level of competence may lead to their inflexibility surrounding change (Yoon, 2016). Catone et. al. (2017) found that teachers feel they have little agency outside of the classroom or school space and thus are often resistant to change. However, when teachers find that their ideologies are consistent with the proposed change, they typically support and feel positive about the change (Briggs et. al., 2018).

Educational change has a greater chance of success when teachers are committed to the change and feel some control over the change process (Lee & Min, 2017). School administrators' support plays a huge role in increasing teacher buy-in by both shaping the school culture and in leading the planning of the implementation of educational change (Yoon, 2016). Yoon (2016) goes on to say that when principals provide teachers with evidence to support an educational change, this may help teachers better to understand the need for change and in turn to facilitate teachers' commitment to the new program.

Principals who explain a proposed change to teachers can strengthen change implementation.

School culture also plays an integral role in facilitating change (Deal & Peterson, 2016). According to Sabanci, Ahmet Sahin, Sonmez, and Yilmaz (2016), positive school cultures are embedded with a shared vision, values, and norms that direct organizational behavior. In addition, positive school cultures include principal and teacher leadership and principal and teacher collaboration on a regular basis (Sabanci et al., 2016). Teachers in a positive school culture might see goal failure as an opportunity for improvement and a time to embrace educational change, whereas a negative school culture might perpetuate pessimism, passing blame, and rejecting the change (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). Culture plays a significant role in the creation of a change mindset and the subsequent success of a change because people become connected to one another in support of the goals of the proposed change (Inandi & Giliç, 2016).

Although leaders are often thought of as administrators and district level personnel, an important aspect of educational leadership is the leadership that exists in each of the teachers and staff members who contribute to the decisions made within a school (Deal & Peterson, 2016). Leadership can contribute to or take away from the overall progress toward change (Deal & Peterson, 2016). According to Komives (2016), perspectives and philosophies of leadership gradually can emerge as a cohesive approach to championing school improvement and educational change. However, power struggles within organizations with a more centralized leadership approach may hinder educational change (Komives, 2016). School leadership also plays an important role in creating the

conditions in schools that support teachers' implementation efforts (Sentočnik, Sales, & Richardson, 2018).

According to Lukacs (2015), teachers who are change agents share the personal characteristics of other teachers and have their support, have an unwavering commitment to service, and believe that teaching is an occupation guided by moral principles (Lukacs, 2015). Van der Heijden, Geldens, Beijaard, and Popeijus (2015) found similar characteristics among teachers who were agents of change in primary schools. Lukacs (2015) stated that teachers who are change agents do not only acknowledge a problem in their school; they also understand that they have a role in implementing positive change. According to Catone, et al. (2017), change agents establish relationships, break down barriers, and gather resources for the school in an attempt to enhance students' educational outcomes.

In the school that was the focus of this study, some part of this implementation process may have been overlooked. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore primary teachers' and administrators' perspectives of PBIS implementation at the target school and ways their efforts to guide children's behavior have been supported or hindered by the implementation of PBIS. The failure of PBIS to resolve behavior issues among primary grade students at the target school is the problem that guides this study. This study may contribute to the body of knowledge needed to address this problem because educators' perspectives of possible causes of PBIS failure will be explored and perhaps identified.

Summary

In this chapter, I reviewed current literature on discipline strategies used in early childhood, on PBIS, and on educational change. Major themes in the literature include research on behavior and discipline in early childhood, PBIS as a behavior model, PBIS in the K-3 setting, and implementing educational change. PBIS is a three-tiered behavior management system that can be used reduce discipline problems and promote positive behavior. A review of the literature provided evidence that PBIS increases student achievement and decreases disruptive behavior. I also described this study's framework based in Fullan's change theory and how this framework supports my investigation of a problem of educational change that is evident in the target school district. Missing from the literature were reports of similar problems experienced in other districts with the same educational change, the implementation of PBIS. To close the gap between research and practice, the following study addressed the gap in the literature in regard to the educator perceptions on the implementation of PBIS in K-3 classrooms. In the following chapter, I will present the methodology by which I pursued educator perspectives on this problem of a failure of PBIS.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how primary teachers and administrators identified the need for, implemented, and maintained PBIS to resolve students’ behavior problems. This chapter is organized in the following subsections: research design and rationale, role of the researcher, methodology, trustworthiness, and ethical procedures.

Research Design and Rationale

The central phenomenon explored in this study was educational change, specifically educators’ perspectives of a change initiative that failed to achieve the desired results. To explore primary grade teachers’ and administrators’ perspectives of PBIS implementation at the target school, and what resources they describe as important in supporting efforts to resolve children’s challenging behavior, as well as what barriers they describe as factors that have hindered efforts to resolve children’s challenging, three central questions guided this study:

RQ1: How did K-3 teachers and administrators determine the need to implement PBIS to resolve students’ behavior problems?

RQ2: How do K-3 teachers and administrators implement PBIS to resolve students’ behavior problems?

RQ3: How do K-3 teachers and administrators maintain PBIS to resolve students’ behavior problems?

The research tradition I employed in this study was constructivist, in that the results were socially constructed from the experiences reported by participants (see

Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). To that end, I applied a basic qualitative design using interviews. This tradition was selected because this study relied on educators' personal perspectives regarding the implementation of PBIS at the target school. A qualitative research design provided opportunities to look deeply into participants' perspectives by engaging them in dialogue through interviews and relating to their shared experiences (Hatch, 2002). Merriam (2002) suggested qualitative research is conducted to understand the meaning and perspectives individuals have had as they interact in the real world. A qualitative design was selected because the research questions indicate a need to analyze in depth the perspectives of the small group of teachers and administrators working at the target school, but a quantitative design would suit different research questions, aimed at determining patterns and trends across a larger group (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2002).

Phenomenological, narrative research, and case study strategies were also considered for the research design in this study. Phenomenological research was not appropriate for this study because it focuses on the understanding of individuals' experiences of a specific event (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Although Yin (2009) suggested that interviews can be an important part of a case study, a case study requires an exploration of a problem through multiple lenses, in addition to interviews. Lastly, narrative research was not appropriate because I was not seeking to collect stories or documents of the lived experiences of individuals (Creswell, 2013). A basic qualitative study using interviews was the most appropriate strategy by which to answer the research questions posed in this study. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) explained that a basic

qualitative study design is used to explore practical results and useful applications regarding what can be learned about a given issue or problem.

Role of the Researcher

I served as an observer-participant during the semistructured interview process. The research was conducted in a school where I was a special education teacher and member of the PBIS team from 2015-2018. I am currently a special education teacher at an elementary school in another district. I have worked with some of the participants in the past but not in a supervisory role. I do not currently have a supervisory relationship with any of the participants of this study.

In addition to being an observer-participant in this study, I was what Dwyer and Buckle (2009) call an *insider*, in that I have personal experience with PBIS implementation at the target school and was a member of staff there. My insider status provided me with credibility among the teachers and administrators I interviewed, and an understanding of their experiences that an outsider might not be able to achieve. However, being an insider also means that I brought to this study my own recollections of the PBIS implementation and possible bias resulting from that. To reduce the effect of researcher's bias, I used the reflexivity strategy (see Johnson, 1997). This included journaling as well as continual self-evaluation of any potential bias.

Methodology

Participant Selection

Qualitative research studies typically involve a small number of participants who share similar experiences (Creswell, 2007). This study included 10 participants at a single

public elementary school located in a city in the southeastern United States. The population from which I drew participants included two administrators, one guidance counselor, 11 general education teachers in kindergarten through third grade, two special education teachers in two additional classrooms, and eight support teachers, including art, music, physical education, garden, computer, and Early Intervention program teachers. I used purposeful sampling in that participants were limited to those who were employed at the target school during the time that PBIS was adopted and implemented, and who are currently implementing PBIS daily. All classroom teachers, special education teachers, and support teachers were invited to volunteer for the study. Of those who volunteered, I accepted one teacher per grade level kindergarten through third grade (four teachers total), one K-3 special education teacher, two support teachers who serve K-3 children, and one guidance counselor, for a total of eight participant teachers. If no one from a particular grade level volunteered, then additional volunteers from other grade levels (K-3) were accepted. In addition, both administrators were invited to participate. Participants were recruited through an email sent to their school email address. The introductory letter invited interested participants to contact me via phone, text, or email to volunteer for the study.

Merriam and Tisdell (2015) stated that single site cases and the number of people in a case are key considerations and may lower the needed number compared to larger cases and multi-site studies. Minimizing the number of participants allows for deeper inquiry and provides more in-depth data (Creswell, 2007). The minimum number of participants set at eight is supported by Merriam and Tisdell (2015), who acknowledged

that in qualitative research only enough participants needed enough different points of view to portray diverse perspective are necessary.

Instrumentation

In this study, semistructured interviews served as the main data collection instrument. The data collection instruments for this study were an interview protocol and an audio recorder. The interview questions were asked with the purpose of answering the three research questions for the study. I devised an interview protocol for teachers (Appendix A) and for administrators (Appendix B), based on factors suggested by Fullan's change theory. The interview questions were reviewed by a PBIS coach not associated with this study to ensure content validity.

Four interview questions addressed the concern of challenging behavior in their classrooms prior to implementation of PBIS, teachers' role in managing children's challenging behavior, the skills teachers needed to implement PBIS, and their role in implementing PBIS. The questions were the same for both the teacher version and the administrator version, with only semantic changes to suit the two different groups. Follow up questions were used to probe for more detail depending on the participants' answers; possible follow up questions are included in the two interview protocols. The use of a semistructured interview process allowed me the use of such probes to delve into unexpected themes that may emerge throughout the interview process (Bogdan & Bilken, 2017).

The interview questions (Appendices A and B) reflect the conceptual framework and were developed in response to the research questions. Aligning the interview

questions with the research questions helps to ensure content validity, or whether an instrument answers the research questions (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). To answer RQ1, about how teachers and administrators determined the need to implement PBIS to resolve students' behavior problems, I used responses to Interview Question 1. To answer RQ2, about how teachers and administrators implemented PBIS to resolve students' behavior problems, I used the results from Interview Questions 2 and 3. I used the results from Interview Question 4 to answer the third research question, about how teachers and administrators maintained PBIS to resolve students' behavior problems.

I was also an instrument for data collection, since the interview experience for participants was under my control, as were the data I chose to include in the analysis and the analysis and interpretation of those data. To minimize my influence on the study results, I used the interview protocols to ensure that the participants were asked the same questions in the same order. I also used an audio recorder as the main means to record participants' words during the interview, so I captured what participants said as completely and accurately as possible. I strove to be aware of my biases, and to avoid inserting my own opinions into the interviews or into the data interpretation. To aid me in this awareness, I kept a reflective journal during the data collection and analysis process, as suggested by Merriam and Tisdell (2015).

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

The procedure for gaining access to the participants began with Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (approval #2-05-19-0586759). The school district where the target school is located required IRB approval before gaining approval at the school

or district level. Once provisional IRB approval to conduct the study was obtained, I sought approval to conduct the study from the principal at the target school. After receiving this approval, I completed the paperwork necessary to gain permission from the school district to conduct the study, following the protocol established by the target county. After acquiring permission from the school district, I finalized Walden IRB approval.

Following completion of the approvals process, I opened the opportunity to participate in the study to all the K-3 teachers in this school via an email. Email addresses for all teachers and administrators were available through the school webpage. The email invited interested participants to contact me via phone, text, or email to volunteer for the study. I provided teachers who expressed interest in the study with more information about participation in the study via email. The recruitment period lasted for 3 weeks, until the target number of participants volunteered. There were enough volunteers during the initial recruitment period; therefore, a second invitation was not needed. The target number of participants was 10, including one teacher per grade level kindergarten through third grade (four teachers total), one K-3 special education teacher, two support teachers who serve K-3 children, and one guidance counselor, for a total of eight participant teachers. In addition, I invited two administrators who had responsibility at the K-3 level. The first general education teacher at each grade level, the first special education teacher, and the first two support teachers to accept the invitation formed the sample. I emailed each teacher and administrator the consent form to review, and suggest

a date, time, and a location for the interview. The consent form was also provided electronically at the time of the interview.

The interviews took place virtually at a time that is convenient for each study participant using a private room at my house. Each interview took place in a single session. Before each interview began, I asked the participant to verbally agree to the consent form. The interviews were audio recorded with participants' permission and stored on a password protected device. The McNamara's (2009) guide for preparing and conducting the individual semi structured interviews will be used when preparing my interviews with the participants. Following McNamara (2009), I established with each participant the suitability of the setting, the purpose of the interview, the confidentiality of our conversation, expectations for the interview process, the intended length of the interview, my contact information, participants' freedom to ask questions or to refrain from answering any particular question, and to withdraw from the interview at any time, and participants' approval to begin the interview. Each interview took between 30 and 45 minutes. Audio recordings were transcribed into individual text files after each interview took place. The interviews took place over a four-week period. At the end of the interview process, all participants were provided with an opportunity to ask any questions they had about the study and were thanked for their participation. I emailed participants a transcript of their interview, with a request that they review the transcript for accuracy and report to me any changes they wished me to make. No participants make any changes to their transcript.

Data Analysis Plan

Following data collection, I analyzed the findings. I began with coding, which was used to find broadly related phenomenon to group together (Lodico et al., 2010). This process began with reading through the interview transcripts to acquire an overall sense of the data (precoding) and then identifying ideas and concepts related to the research questions, highlighting these and creating a tentative list of codes (O'Neall, 2013). Saldaña's (2015) procedures for initial hand coding process provide cohesive data analysis by highlighting common terms, ideas, and processes by color to identify similarities among the interviews. The process of coding will lead to condensing, merging, layering, and collapsing to create categories (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

I used open coding during the first level of the coding process to identify codes and ideas that emerge from the data. First, I organized the data and compared the notes taken during the interviews to the audio recordings. I created a three-column table for each interview and pasted the interview transcript in the middle column. The left column was used to note codes assigned to highlighted material on the transcript, and the right-hand column was used to record field notes taken during the interview or ideas that came up as during the coding process. I then sorted codes into categories, so that different words were grouped by similarity of idea (Saldaña, 2015). I then examined these categories for similar ideas, grouping ideas into overarching themes and organizing these themes by color (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). In this way, the many similar significant words extracted from individual interviews were distilled into several categories and the categories further distilled into a few themes that express the

perspectives of teachers and administrators. This process continued until all the data were coded. Any discrepant information was noted and considered separately. Discrepant cases are those data that contradict the emerging explanations or themes or are unexpected or nonconforming data (Creswell, 2013).

Trustworthiness

In this qualitative research study, I established credibility by ensuring that issues presented and discussed throughout the entire study are clear. Credibility concerns whether the researcher's depiction of a participant's perspective is accurate (Lodico, et al, 2010). I ensured the credibility of this study with a consistent interview process, framed by an interview protocol.

Transferability in qualitative research is interpreted by the reader (Lodico et al., 2010), who determines the relevance of a study's findings to other sites. By interviewing persons who represent different roles at the target school, I increased the transferability of the findings, since participants addressed the same issues from different perspectives. I provided thick descriptions that depict a detailed picture of the perspectives of participants at the target school, providing sufficient detail to enable the reader to determine if the research is relevant to them. Creswell (2013) defined a trustworthy qualitative study to include elements such as transferability and dependability.

Dependability was established by conducting audit trails, which includes a thorough collection of documentation for all aspects of the study. Cohen and Crabtree (2006) described an audit trail as a detailed description of all steps taken in the research

process. This included detailed note-taking and audio recording of my interviews and by establishing uniform interview conditions, ensuring transparency in the research process.

Confirmability refers to the degree to which the results of the study reflect the perspectives of the participants, rather than the researcher's interpretation (Amankwaa, 2016). I completed an audit trail which includes detailed descriptions of the research process from data collection to reporting findings, ensuring that the data reported was based on participant responses, and not influenced by my own bias. I documented the entire coding process, my thoughts and interpretations of the data, and my rationale for determining themes and patterns. Finally, I maintained reflexivity journal to help with any researcher bias.

Ethical Procedures

Qualitative research can present the potential for unethical behavior and or researcher bias if measures are not put into place from to prevent this from happening (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). It is important to create uniform system for collecting and analyzing data that leaves little room for researcher bias (Lodico, et al., 2010). To ensure this study is out in a professional manner, I examined ethical matters, including those related to bias and confidentiality, and addressed them prior to the beginning of the study by adhering to clear and consistent research procedures.

I ensured the protection of human participants by securing permission to conduct my study from two review boards. Information about the research methodology and procedures was included in my application to the IRB of Walden University. The IRB serves to evaluate research studies for adherence to ethical research procedures and

compliance to human research guidelines. In addition, approval was obtained from the county in which the research took place after the approval of the research proposal. The county required that university approval of the research proposal be obtained before county level IRB approval is applied for. Once university approval was obtained (approval #12-05-19-0586759), I completed the electronic application form required by the county before conducting my research.

Once approvals were granted, I employed ethical procedures in my interactions with participants. I provided informed consent to participants first via an email, also containing information about the study, followed by verbal consent at the time of each interview. The consent form described the voluntary nature of participation, interview procedures, guarantee of confidentiality, participant risks and benefits, and withdrawal of consent prior to starting the study, in alignment with Creswell (2013) and Lodico et al. (2010). Because minors were not involved in the data gathering process of this study, there were no parental consents or ethical concerns involving students. During the interviews, I treated each person respectfully, and started the interview by stating that all answers were acceptable, that responses were strictly confidential, and that participants may opt out of the study at any point without penalty. Although I did not anticipate that the topic of the interviews would be controversial, I planned to guide any participate who became upset during the interview to the employee supports offered by the cooperating school district. Once interviews were concluded, data gathered was be stored on a password protected device and remains confidential. All information pertaining to this study will be purged after a five-year period beyond the completion of this study.

Electronic data will be permanently deleted from the device it is stored on an any paper documents will be shredded.

Summary

In this study I explored how primary teachers and administrators identified the need for, implemented, and maintained PBIS to resolve students' behavior problems. In this chapter I provided a detailed description of my plans for conducting this qualitative case study. The use of semistructured interviews will allow each participant to express their first-hand experiences, which offers contextual data. In this chapter, I described details of the school setting, population sample, and research criteria. I also addressed data-collection procedures, ethical considerations, limitations, researcher bias, and trustworthiness. Chapter 4 builds on this discussion by addressing the detailed results of the research.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how primary teachers and administrators identified the need for, implemented, and maintained PBIS to resolve students' behavior problems. I wanted to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of what gaps in practice needed to be addressed in the research settings to promote and improve the implementation of PBIS. I used semistructured interviews to allow the 10 participants the opportunity to share their perspectives on the implementation of PBIS at the target school. The research was guided by the following research questions

RQ1: How did K-3 teachers and administrators determine the need to implement PBIS to resolve students' behavior problems?

RQ2: How do K-3 teachers and administrators implement PBIS to resolve students' behavior problems?

RQ3: How do K-3 teachers and administrators maintain PBIS to resolve students' behavior problems?

In this chapter, I present the data analysis. I begin with a description of the study setting, followed by the demographics, data collection process, and analysis. I explain the methods employed to ensure trustworthiness of the study and describe how the study was completed according to my research proposal. The chapter concludes with a summary of the data analysis and results.

Setting

Participant eligibility was determined by their interactions with students in prekindergarten through third grade at the target school who were there during the

implementation of PBIS. Next, all the potential participants who worked in the target school were emailed. Each teacher and administrator email address were located on the school's public website. The 13 emails sent to potential participants asked them if they would be willing to participate in a research study on the implementation of PBIS. The consent form was also attached to the email. Ten individuals responded affirmatively to the email and formed the study sample. Participating in the study were one kindergarten teacher, two first grade teachers, one second grade teacher, one third grade teacher, one Early Intervention Program teacher, one media specialist, the school counselor, the school's assistant principal, and the principal.

Data Collection

Participation in the study included individual, in-person interviews. Participants were given a few dates and times for the interview and they chose their preference. The 10 people who expressed interest in the study all participated and were interviewed once. Interviews were held via Google Meets and all were conducted after school hours or on weekends. Participants were in their homes during the interviews and I was in my home office. The interview protocol provided in Chapter 3 was followed for each interview. I recorded interviews using Google Meets with participant permission. The camera option on Google Meets was disabled. After the interviews, I transcribed the audio files using Google Docs, and then sent the transcripts to each participant with a request that they review the transcript for accuracy and contact me with any corrections. No changes were requested by any participant. After each interview, I made notes in the reflexive journal

about how I felt the interview went and my thoughts on the interviewee's responses. No follow up interviews were needed.

Data Analysis

I applied thematic analysis to the interview transcriptions from teachers and administrators. After each interview, I made notes in the reflexive journal about how I felt the interview went and my thoughts on the interviewee's responses. Using Google Docs, I transcribed each audio-recorded interview, including my notes. I then began the process of precoding the data. First, I read through the interview transcripts to acquire an overall sense of the participants' thoughts and understandings. During this initial reading, I highlighted recurring words, phrases, and concepts related to the research questions to identify similarities among the interviews and identify preliminary codes. I also made notes in the margins (preliminary jottings) related to terms and concepts linked to the research questions. This entire process helped me become familiar with the data. I listened to audio of each interview multiple times while I transcribed it verbatim, reflected on the notes I made as the interview conversations were ongoing, then reread the interviews and made additional notes of ideas that seemed significant to the participants.

During second level coding, I reread each transcript and began categorizing my codes. I searched the transcripts from the interviews for information about how teachers and administrators perceived the implementation of PBIS at the target school. I noted the use of repeated words, sentences, and phrases, such as negative behaviors, loss of instructional time, and difficulty managing students.

As I examined the codes that were generated, I used the open coding approach, as described by Saldana (2015), which allowed me to examine the coded interview transcripts and field notes. I identified 54 open codes. The most frequent codes were positive learning environment (6), limited professional development (5), mindset (4), minimal support (4), commitment (4), limited school wide expectations (3), limited motivation (3), defiance/disrespect (3), modeling (2), leadership and fidelity (2), challenging behaviors (2). I used second cycle coding to search for relationship among the open codes and data. I organized these codes into nine categories: limited commitment, teacher barriers, student barriers, tools for implementation, behavior management strategies, data, professional development and support, and behavior problems prior to implementation of PBIS. The codes and their associated categories are presented in Appendix C.

Third level coding then granted me the opportunity to develop an even richer understanding of teacher and administrator perspectives on the implementation of PBIS. I consolidated my nine categories into four themes, an appropriate number of themes, as recommended by Creswell (2015). These themes were behavior problems prior to implementation, barriers of PBIS implementation, PBIS implementation strategies, and PBIS training and support. The themes and the categories that support them are presented in Table 1. I reviewed themes considering the phenomenon to have a better understanding of the phenomenon by rereading the entire transcripts, searching for discrepant or negative cases, and/reviewing my notes.

I anticipated discrepant cases would include data contradictory to the themes. I did not note any such discrepancies during analysis. Thus, I have no issues of discrepant cases to report.

Table 1

Categories and Themes Emergent from the Data

Categories	Themes
Defiance/disrespect Limited school wide expectations Behavior data	Behavior problems prior to implementation of PBIS
Tools for implementation Positive learning environment Behavior strategies	PBIS implementation strategies
Limited commitment Teacher barriers Student barriers	Barriers of PBIS implementation
Professional development Support	PBIS training and support

According to the interview transcripts, teachers felt that professional development and providing a positive learning environment were the two most important factors in the implementation of PBIS.

Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore how primary teachers and administrators identified the need for, implemented, and maintained PBIS to resolve students' behavior problems. Three research questions guided the analysis of results for this study. Participant responses are organized in the following sections by research question and include verbatim evidence from the transcripts. The eight teacher participants are represented with a T and a numeral and the two administrator participants are represented with an A and a numeral.

Results for RQ1

RQ1 asked, "How did K-3 teachers and administrators determine the need to implement PBIS to resolve students' behavior problems?" This RQ is associated with the theme of behavior problems noted prior to implementation of PBIS. To answer this RQ, I analyzed findings from interview question (IQ)1. Participants remarked that prior to the implementation of PBIS, children at the target school exhibited a high frequency of problem behaviors. These behaviors included disrespectful behavior, inappropriate interaction between students, and fighting. Teacher and administrator participants noted that teachers spent quite a bit of time during instruction dealing with interruptions due to behavior. A1 stated, "disrespectful behavior, inappropriate interaction between students and fights were at an all-time high." T2 went on to say, "we saw negative behaviors with students as young as 4 years old." Similarly, T7 said, "there have always been challenging behaviors in younger students; however, I feel like they were more severe and prevalent than ever." Most participants expressed concern with behaviors seen in the

target school before the implementation of PBIS. Overall, teachers and administrators noted disrespect, defiance, and other challenging behaviors that prompted their interest in implementing PBIS and the behavior management strategies associated with it.

Participants further explained that there was limited consistency in behavior management applied throughout the school. T4 noted, “the classroom management strategies used in the school are based on different teachers’ perceptions and [it] has been difficult to uphold expectations.” Similarly, T7 explained that although individual teachers may have their own set of classroom rules, “it is important for a school to be on the same page with school wide expectations.” A2 said that, although the school had school wide expectations posted, “the faculty was still identifying what the expectations should look like in all parts of the learning environment.” Prior to the implementation of PBIS, behavior concerns were noted in the form of defiance, disrespect, and other challenging behaviors. As a solution to this problem, several participants expressed the need for school wide behavior expectations to help manage negative behavior. PBIS provides schools with strategies for implementing school wide supports.

A2, T2, and T6 all stated that the problem of challenging behavior was an issue in their individual classrooms. T2 explained that these behaviors, “created disruptive learning environments, teacher frustration and academic decline.” Similarly, T1 noted the correlation between, “managing behaviors, and the impact that it has on student achievement.” A2 noted “implementing a behavior management plan would provide an equitable learning environment for all students.” T6 said, “a school wide initiative was necessary to eliminate negative behaviors and provide consistent behavior supports

throughout the entire school." A1 stated, "the challenging behaviors created disruptive learning environments, teacher frustration, and academic decline. This threatened quality instructional practices and thus effected student academic achievement." There seemed to be a consensus that behavior concerns were relevant to all classrooms and students before the implementation of PBIS.

In regard to motivation to implement PBIS, T3 mentioned that they were motivated to find a behavior plan that "was not only for my own classroom but also that was schoolwide, so the same rules apply everywhere kids went." T1 also noted, "I was very motivated to minimize problem behaviors in my classroom and around the school." T2 was motivated to implement PBIS because, "I felt like it aligned nicely with my pedagogical belief to provide students with a positive learning environment." T5 said the teachers "felt motivated to implement PBIS because students become a part of the classroom management plan, so they had a sense of belonging and an incentive to be successful." In contrast, T8 stated that they were reluctant to use PBIS. "I was a firm believer that nothing could help these students with extreme behaviors." However, overall, the participants expressed moderate to high motivation to implement behavior strategies to help resolve negative behaviors, prior to the PBIS implementation at the school.

In answer to RQ1, about the need to implement PBIS to resolve students' behavior problems, the data indicated that behavior concerns were seen across all school settings and were relevant to all teachers and administrators. All teacher and administrator participants expressed that prior to the implementation of PBIS, there had

been an increase in challenging behaviors. While teachers focused their responses on how it affected instructional time in their individual classrooms, administrators focused on how behaviors affected academic achievement. The theme that emerged from RQ1 was that problem behaviors were noted prior to the implementation of PBIS.

Results for RQ2

RQ 2 asked, “How do K-3 teachers and administrators implement PBIS to resolve students’ behavior problems?” This RQ is associated with the theme of barriers encountered in the implementation of PBIS. To answer this RQ, I analyzed findings from IQ2 and IQ3. Barriers that emerged included limited district support for teachers as they tried to implement PBIS, confusion over the scope of PBIS implementation, and limited commitment to the implementation of PBIS.

When asked how the implementation of PBIS was supported, T4 noted limited district support, stating “After the initial roll out, we did not have any schoolwide trainings or support from county office. Actually, we were kind of left to figure it out on our own.” Several participants indicated they supplemented training provided by the district with their own research. T2 and T5 said that some teachers decided to research PBIS on their own. T5 further stated that teachers’ knowledge of PBIS was at least in part “self-taught.” Incomplete support from both the district and school administrators for PBIS implementation created a barrier to authentic application of the program. T8 said, “I do not feel that the [PBIS] system was well established. It was easier to use a firm redirect or short time out to manage negative classroom behaviors.”

Participants described some confusion over whether PBIS was intended to be classroom-focused or whole-school focused. T5 and T8 stated that they felt that their only responsibility in making PBIS successful was how they implemented it within their own classrooms. T5 stated, “I only implemented the parts of PBIS that administration required in my classroom.” T8 noted that she was “only responsible for giving the rewards in the classroom.” In contrast, T2 stated, “I felt responsible to my own classroom students as well as all stakeholders to provide students with the best opportunity for learning success.” Similarly, T6 said, “I worked with all students and helped with quarterly PBIS celebrations as well as pushing out new interventions to the faculty and staff.” Administrators conceived PBIS as a school-wide initiative that extended beyond implementation in individual classrooms. A2 noted, “administration plays a key role in ensuring that PBIS is successful by ensuring that staff implements PBIS with fidelity, providing professional development and monitoring structures to support the initiative.” Similarly, A1 said, “PBIS was a huge part of my role due to the fact that it embodied the success of the learning environment school wide.”

In answer to how much commitment participants felt to the implementation of PBIS, teachers and administrators differed. For example, T8 stated, “my only responsibility was to consistently give rewards but as the program was not consistently implemented thought the year, that began to feel less important.” T3 explained, “I felt that I had a big responsibility to help implement PBIS expectations in my classroom as well as encourage students in the hallways and around the school.” Teacher commitment seemed limited to PBIS implementation in their classrooms, but administrators expressed

commitment to PBIS implementation across the entire school. For example, A1 stated, “It was my role to ensure that students followed PBIS expectations. This helped ensure the success of the learning environment school wide.” A2 explained, “I play a key role in ensuring all elements of a school are conducive to high levels of learning and for ensuring any initiative, including PBIS, will be successful.” Overall, most teachers felt the implementation of PBIS was a part of their role in their classrooms, with children for whose behavior they felt responsible, while both administrators saw the implementation of PBIS as part of their role as school leaders. Teachers expressed some confusion about the scope of PBIS, and cited lack of training as a barrier to PBIS implementation. The theme that was associated with this research question described the barriers encountered during implementation of PBIS.

Results for RQ3

RQ 3 asked, “How do K-3 teachers and administrators maintain PBIS to resolve students’ behavior problems?” Themes associated with this RQ were PBIS implementation strategies and PBIS training and support. To answer RQ3, I analyzed findings from IQ4. Elements that supported PBIS implementation focused on educator knowledge and mindset, and ongoing professional development.

Participants stated that mindset played an important role in the implementation of PBIS. T4 noted, “a growth mindset is needed, because as you extinguish a challenging behavior, that behavior must be replaced with a constructive behavior.” T6 stated, “along with a having a growth mindset, the implementation of PBIS also requires an understanding of behavior itself. You need a basic understanding of behavior and the

functions of behavior." Both participants agreed that understanding cause of the behavior is imperative to minimizing the behavior in the future and that training in this area was needed to successfully implement PBIS. A1 noted, "I needed to understand the elements of implementing a successful PBIS program, how to analyze the discipline data, and how to monitor the program. In short, I needed to understand the cycle of successful program implementation." In contrast, T1 noted, "I don't think there are any specific skills needed to implement PBIS, but you must be willing to train yourself to have a different mindset if you tend to see behavior negatively."

In addition, teacher and administrator participants felt that continued professional development and support on how to implement PBIS were important throughout the implementation process. A2 noted, "the resources needed to support implementation were ongoing professional development for staff, clear communication of expectations, and data analysis to provide on-going monitoring of behaviors." T3 said, "I didn't feel that I needed skills to implement PBIS, but I did feel that I needed professional development on how to model behaviors and what language to use." Participants also sought training material of their own to aid in the implementation of PBIS. T2 stated, "I needed [training] material describing PBIS and its implementation and support systems from a school and district level." T5 indicated that they gained skills through a mixture of personal research and school and district support. She said, "Some of the skills acquired were through district trainings while others were self-taught through research and resources from the [state Department of Education] website for PBIS." Similarly, T7 stated, "I have attended

a PBIS conference as well as various trainings. In addition, I have used a lot of information that I found on the Department of Education website."

In answer to RQ3, which asked participants to describe the skills they needed to implement PBIS, and their efforts to master and apply these skills, participants suggested that professional development and district support were both important tools in the implementation of PBIS. T2 and T7 sought outside professional development and research to deepen their understanding of PBIS. The administrators noted that it was important to understand how to analyze discipline data to successfully manage student behavior. Teachers and administrators alike cited a growth mindset as a key to PBIS implementation. The themes that arose from RQ3 were PBIS implementation strategies and PBIS training and support.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility refers to the accuracy of the data, including a researcher's depiction of a participant's perspective (Lodico, et al., 2010). I supported the credibility of this study by audio-recording interviews so I could capture exact descriptions of participants' perspectives, then transcribed these recordings verbatim. I then asked participants to review their transcripts to confirm the accuracy of the interviews. Transcript review adds to the validity to the results of this study, although this validity is limited.

Qualitative research is embedded in context, so transferability is determined by the reader in reference to their own situation (Lodico et al., 2010). In this study I facilitated transferability by providing detailed descriptions of the study setting, participant criteria and selection, my data collection method, and the process of data

analysis, so readers can determine if my findings are applicable in specific contexts. The phenomenon of PBIS failure has been unexplored in the literature, which suggests relevance to readers who have experienced this phenomenon.

In support of dependability of this study's findings, I kept careful records of my research process throughout the study. I used audio recording from my laptop as well as field notes to be certain of capturing all the data accurately. Also, I kept a reflective journal to record my thinking as the study progressed and to limit interference in my data transcription and analysis of any personal bias. I described my study process carefully, so future researchers may replicate my study or use it as the basis for investigations that expand on my findings.

Confirmability refers to the degree to which the results of the study reflect the perspectives of the participants, rather than the researcher's interpretation (Amankwaa, 2016). I completed an audit trail which includes detailed descriptions of the research process from data collection to reporting findings, ensuring that the data reported was based on participant responses, and not influenced by my own bias. I documented the entire coding process, my thoughts and interpretations of the data, and my rationale for determining themes and patterns.

Summary

In Chapter 4, I described the setting, data collection, and methods for data analysis. I also described the results of the study, as well as evidence of trustworthiness. Themes that emerged from the data included behavior problems prior to the implementation of PBIS, PBIS implementation strategies, barriers of PBIS

implementation, and PBIS training and support. Participants indicated they saw negative behaviors prior to the implementation of PBIS which led to implementation of this program; however, there were some barriers in the implementation of PBIS at the target school, including limited district support for teachers as they tried to implement PBIS, confusion over the scope of PBIS implementation, and limited commitment to the implementation of PBIS. Teachers and administrators cited the importance of a growth mindset and of ongoing professional development as elements that supported the implementation of PBIS and its continued use at the school. Results of this study suggested that teachers and administrators felt that they needed more support in the form of professional development in the implementation of PBIS. In Chapter 5, I will present an interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations for further research, and the potential of social change.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to explore primary grade teachers' and administrators' perspectives of PBIS implementation at the target school, and what resources they describe as important in supporting efforts to resolve children's challenging behavior, as well as what barriers they describe as factors that have hindered efforts to resolve children's challenging. I used a basic qualitative approach with teachers and administrators to explore their perspectives on the implementation of PBIS at the target school. Four themes emerged from the data included behavior problems prior to the implementation of PBIS, PBIS implementation strategies, barriers of PBIS implementation, and PBIS training and support. Key findings suggested that both teachers and administrators felt that there were behavior problems prior to the implementation of PBIS, but that there were barriers to the implementation of the PBIS program, despite strategies were put in place to facilitate PBIS implementation. Teachers and administrators suggested that continued professional development is important to success in implementing PBIS and to continued success of the program.

Interpretation of the Findings

One theme that emerged from an analysis of these data was that negative behaviors were a concern for classroom teachers and administrators for students in grades K-3 prior to the implementation of PBIS. The data indicated that behavior concerns were evident across all school settings and were relevant to all teachers and administrators. All teacher and administrator participants indicated that prior to the implementation of PBIS, there was an increase in challenging behaviors. This aligns with the previous research on

behavior. According to Reinke et al. (2013), many teachers have reported that behavior management is a continuous or issue in the classroom. Teacher and administrator participants of this study noted that teachers were spending a significant amount of instructional time dealing with negative behaviors. The prevalence of early elementary students exhibiting problem behaviors is between 7% and 10% (Caldarella et al., 2015, p. 359). While teachers focused their responses on how behavior affected instructional time in their individual classrooms, administrators focused on how behaviors affected academic achievement. The fact that administrators were less concerned than teachers about the effect of behavior on everyday instruction may have contributed to limited behavior improvement following implementation of PBIS and may have even led to the reduced achievement administrators feared. In a study conducted by Childs et al. (2016), ineffectual student discipline during early childhood through elementary grades was correlated with scholastic underachievement. This appears to have been confirmed in my study.

A second theme of the study was that of barriers to implementation of PBIS. The literature confirmed that barriers are opposed to the successful launch of a new initiative. For example, Fullan (2014) stated that failure to include the participation of all members leads to failure of an effort to create systemic change. Feuerborn et al. (2018) also found that lack of acceptance of behavioral interventions by all the stakeholders, especially administrators, can disrupt the success of the behavioral intervention in schools. Evanovich and Scott (2016) stated that inconsistency in implementation of educational change hinders successful realization of the intended change throughout a school. In this

study, barriers included teacher perceptions of limited support for their PBIS implementation efforts, the schoolwide PBIS implementation effort was confined to individual classrooms, and teacher commitment to the implementation of PBIS. Barriers to educational change consistent with the literature, though specific to the target school context, formed a theme in this study.

Another theme that emerged in this study was that teachers and administrators assumed different levels of responsibility in the implementation of PBIS. Administrators saw themselves as playing a major role in the implementation of PBIS and said the PBIS program was implemented with fidelity and consistency. In contrast, teacher responses showed varying degrees of responsibility in their role in implementing PBIS and some teacher participants shared that they only partially implemented PBIS or only did so in their classrooms. Teacher participant answers ranged from feeling that they played a key role in the implementation of PBIS to expressing that PBIS implementation was just one more thing that they were expected to do. This matched the results of Garbacz et al. (2016), who found different levels of perceived responsibility among stakeholders in implementation of PBIS. Swain-Bradway et al. (2015) found that a sense of ownership and pride are essential to the successful implementation of systemic change but variation in stakeholder responsibility is common and can impair a change process. In addition, according to Childs et al. (2016), when teachers take limited responsibility to implement behavior management measures, such as those included in PBIS, they may be unable to modify student behavior patterns. Failure to develop a sense of responsibility among all

teachers at the target school may explain a limited decrease in behavior referrals after the implementation of PBIS.

Participants from this study suggested that professional development and district support were both important tools in the implementation of PBIS, which was another study theme. The administrators noted that it was important to understand how to analyze discipline data to successfully manage student behavior. Study data revealed that professional development was discussed as being an important part of the successful implementation of PBIS in six out of 10 interviews. However, it was evident from participant responses that teachers did not feel they were provided with adequate professional development. The literature suggested that professional development is critical in the implementation of any new program (Whitworth & Chiu, 2015). Professional development is a tool used to reinforce teachers' knowledge and classroom practices, thus, improving student outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 2015). Lane et al. (2015) identified professional development as a key factor in the effectiveness of the implementation of PBIS in schools, so that the inconsistent professional development reported by participants in my study aligns with their findings.

Limitations of the Study

As with all research, there were limitations to the present study that merit consideration. One study limitation was the COVID-19 pandemic that arose just prior to data collection began. To limit the spread of that virus, face-to-face interactions were limited by community prohibitions and school closure, including the target school. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, interviews were held over Google Meet instead of

in person as I had originally planned, and participants were not present at the school or teaching in their own classrooms at the time. This introduced several distractions during the interviews including pets and children. During two of the video chats, I experienced trouble remaining connected to the meeting due to internet connectivity problems. Several times participants had to pause in the middle of the interview to tend to things in their houses. These limitations interfered with the smooth collection of data but did not affect the quality of those data. I was able to complete all interviews and secure clear answers to interview questions, despite the distractions.

Recommendations

Based on this study, I recommend several avenues for future research. This study focused on K-3 teachers' and administrators' perspectives on the implementation of PBIS at a small charter school. Further research could be conducted to examine a larger population of teachers and administrators at schools where PBIS has failed. Information from a larger participant base could provide more insight into why PBIS may fail to reduce behavior referrals in elementary school settings.

Another avenue for future research is how negative behavior affects student achievement. Both teacher and administrator participants in this study felt that negative behaviors had a direct impact on student achievement. Further research should be conducted to obtain teachers' and administrators' perceptions on how students' negative behaviors affect achievement. Investigating this could lead to a better understanding of the correlation between behavior and achievement.

A third avenue for research is to explore student perspectives on the implementation of PBIS. Exploring student perspectives may lead teachers and administrators to better understand what parts of PBIS motivate students to behave. In addition, conducting research involving student perspectives on PBIS may give some insight as to the importance of school wide behavior expectations.

This study's findings suggested that there was limited professional development to support the implementation of PBIS. A fourth avenue for future research is the effect that continued professional development has on the implementation of PBIS. Participants in the study shared that professional development was needed on how to implement and support a successful PBIS program at the school. Exploring this could lead to the success of PBIS in reducing discipline referrals in the future.

Implications

Implications for practice because of this study include the need for continued professional development on the implementation of PBIS. Participants in the study noted that professional development was a key resource needed in the implementation of PBIS. However, several participants from the study expressed that ongoing professional development was not offered at the target school. Participants T2 and T7 shared that they went out on their own to seek outside professional development and research to deepen their understanding of PBIS. Providing teachers and administrators with continued professional development on proper PBIS implementation is necessary to insure the fidelity and success of the program. During the data collection process, teachers and administrators expressed a desire to learn more about PBIS through additional training.

This professional development should be provided at the school level so that there is a common language and consistency in the implementation of the program. Valente, Monteiro, and Lourenço (2019) stated that ongoing professional development is essential for teachers to maintain knowledge and skills and to grow their practice.

This study may benefit teachers because it may cause them to be more mindful of the strategies implemented for managing challenging behaviors in their classroom. This, coupled with the understanding the importance of consistency in behavior management throughout the school, could lead to increased teacher commitment to PBIS. This study may also benefit administrators because it allows them to understand the barriers teachers encountered that affected PBIS implementation. In this study, administrator and teacher experiences of barriers were different, regarding understanding of the scope of PBIS implementation, the usefulness of professional development, and the level of commitment to the PBIS program. According to Fullan (2008), it is important that leaders of educational change listen to their followers and respond to their concerns. By reading teacher responses, administrators may better understand how teachers view the implementation of programs at the school level and where support is limited. This may, in turn, prompt administrators to provide resources for teachers to support the implementation process. This could lead to a more successful school wide implementation of PBIS in the future.

The results of this study may contribute to positive social change by increasing teachers' and administrators' awareness of the need for collaborative effort in implementing an initiative like PBIS, and may lead to increased collaboration as PBIS

continues to be used at the school. This change could be brought about by district level professional development on implementing PBIS and building relationships. Though not measured as part of this study, improvement in student behavior through more collaborative implementation of PBIS may influence student academic performance and student attendance (Sugai & Horner, 2002). The benefits of this change may be that any action that supports positive teacher-student relationships may also lead to a positive learning environment, and increased school success.

Conclusions

In this study I explored how primary teachers and administrators identified the need for, implemented, and maintained PBIS to resolve students' behavior problems. The findings of this study suggested that most teachers recognized the existence of challenging behavior that preceded the implementation of PBIS and supported the implementation of PBIS at the target school, but that they encountered barriers that impeded the implementation of PBIS consistently throughout the school. Barriers teachers cited included confusion over the scope of PBIS, lack of commitment to PBIS, and training in PBIS that many found inadequate. However, neither of the two administrators I interviewed noted any barrier before or after the implementation of PBIS. This lack of appreciation on the part of administrators to teachers' understanding of and preparation for PBIS implementation may have resulted in the failure of PBIS to decrease discipline referrals at the target school. Results of this study suggested that PBIS did not reduce the number of discipline referrals at the target school because there was a lack of consistency in the implementation process and that adequate professional

development was not provided. Students' challenging behavior interferes with instruction and with academic achievement, so successful implementation of a program to reduce challenging behavior has potential to improve teacher and student success. Greater attention to consistency in implementation and continued professional development in any future implementation of PBIS may lead to program success and positive outcomes for students.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol for Teachers

Thanks so much for agreeing to talk with me today. This conversation will be about your experiences with PBIS with your students. I will record our conversation so I'm sure to get everything, but I'll also take some notes, too.

IQ 1. Before PBIS was first implemented, how serious was challenging behavior in K-3 children?

> Follow-up question: How relevant was the concern about challenging behavior to your own classroom and children?
>
> Follow-up question: How motivated were you to see if PBIS would help resolve behavior issues with K-3 children?

IQ 2: Describe your role in managing challenging behavior in K-3 children.

> Follow-up question: How much did you feel implementing PBIS was part of your role?
>
> Follow-up question: Describe the responsibility you felt in making sure PBIS was successful.

IQ 3: What sorts of skills did you need to implement PBIS?

> Follow-up question: Describe resources you needed to acquire and master those skills.
>
> Follow-up question: How was your implementation of PBIS supported, so you could apply your efforts effectively?

IQ 4: An effort like PBIS needs leaders or change agents to get things going and to maintain the efforts of followers. How do you describe your role in the PBIS effort?

Follow-up question: To what extent did you feel committed or “all-in” on PBIS?

Follow-up question: To what extent did you think other teachers or your administrators were committed to PBIS?

Thanks so much for talking with me. Is there anything else you think I should know, regarding PBIS at your school or in your classroom? I'll email you with the interview transcript so you can confirm that it's accurate.

Appendix B: Interview Protocol for Administrators

Thanks so much for agreeing to talk with me today. This conversation will be about your experiences with PBIS with your students. I will record our conversation so I'm sure to get everything, but I'll also take some notes, too.

IQ 1. Before PBIS was first implemented, how serious was challenging behavior in K-3 children?

Follow-up question: How relevant was the concern about challenging behavior to your own work as an administrator?

Follow-up question: How motivated were you to see if PBIS would help resolve behavior issues with K-3 children?

IQ 2: Describe your role in managing challenging behavior in K-3 children.

Follow-up question: How much did you feel implementing PBIS was part of your role?

Follow-up question: Describe the responsibility you felt in making sure PBIS was successful.

IQ 3: What sorts of skills did you need to implement PBIS?

Follow-up question: Describe resources you needed to acquire and master those skills.

Follow-up question: How was your implementation of PBIS supported, so you could apply your efforts effectively?

IQ 4: An effort like PBIS needs leaders or change agents to get things going and to maintain the efforts of followers. How do you describe your role in the PBIS effort?

Follow-up question: To what extent did you feel committed or “all-in” on PBIS?

Follow-up question: To what extent did you think teachers or other administrators were committed to PBIS?

Thanks so much for talking with me. Is there anything else you think I should know, regarding PBIS at your school or in your classroom? I'll email you with the interview transcript so you can confirm that it's accurate.

Appendix C: Data Codes and Categories

Codes	Categories
Moderately motivated	Lack of commitment
Took time to fully commit to PBIS	
Need buy-in from top down	
Not all teachers and admin buy in	
Not all teachers are committed	
Believe in what I am selling	
Took time to fully commit to PBIS	
Lack of staff commitment	
Lack of rapport with co-workers	Teacher barriers
Lack of administrative support	
Low staff morale	
Lack of classroom management	
Still learning how to implement	
Partial implementation	
Trouble managing students	
System not well established	
Motivation to decrease problem behavior	
Fixed mindset	
Lack of consistency	
Teachers struggle with negative mindset	
Home environment a factor in behavior	Student Barriers
Lack of student buy in	
Unequitable learning situation for all students	
Kids who lack motivation	
Traditional discipline didn’t work	
Limited student motivation	
Other students pick up negative behaviors	
Negative behavior causes missed instructional time	
Punitive measures didn’t work	
PBIS is a part of the school culture	Tools for Implementation
Implemented with fidelity	
PBIS is a part of the school culture	
Consistent language throughout the school	
Consistency in implementation	
Clear rewards system	
Consistent signage throughout school	
Need school wide reward system	
Positive change in behavior	
Working toward the same goal	
PBIS is a part of the school culture	
Growth mindset	

Tools to motivate students who need extrinsic motivation	
Consistent expectations	
School implementation plan	
Common “behavior” language	
School wide expectations	
Understanding of the functions of behavior	
Growth mindset	
Positive learning environment	Behavior Strategies
Replacement behaviors	
Coping skills	
Replace negative behavior with constructive behavior	
Positive learning environment	
Positive learning environment	
Intervene and reset students	
Consistent behavior supports throughout the building	
Teach students behavior strategies for self de-escalation	
Use positive language	
Ratio of 4:1 positive to negative statements	
Ensure students understand expectations	
Put interventions in place to decrease behaviors	
Routines	
Clear expectations	
Consistent Consequences	
Make sure students feel successful	
PBIS is more than celebrations and tokens	
Consistent expectations	
Modeling behaviors	
Explicit teaching of behavior expectations	
Modeling appropriate behavior	
Establish clear expectations	
Check in/check out	
Teaching social emotional skills	
Implementing strategies and structures with fidelity	
Explicit teaching of behavior expectations	
Social emotional learning	
Teaching the whole child	
Understanding and analyzing data	

Analyze behavior data and look for patterns	Data
Look at data trends	
Professional development and support	
Need additional trainings	Professional Development
Professional Learning	
Teachers need professional development	
Professional development	
Collaborating with faculty	
Professional development should be ongoing	
Ongoing professional development	
District support of implementation	
Support for staff who struggle with implementation	Support
District and school level supports	
PBIS team supports implementation	
Supporting teachers	
Need district support	
Defiant/Disrespectful behavior	Pre-Implementation Problems
Challenging behaviors	
Fighting	
Behaviors seen across all school settings	
No consistent expectations	