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Rural Primary School Educators' Perspectives of the Responsive Classroom Approach to Teaching

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Tarsha Brown-Foye

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2020

Abstract

Rural Primary School Educators' Perspectives of the Responsive Classroom Approach to

Teaching

by

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EDS, Lincoln Memorial University, 2005

MA, Kennesaw State University, 2003

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

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Abstract

Reactive behavior management strategies used in classrooms to discipline students have been ineffective in limiting discipline problems and decreasing the number of suspensions and expulsions. A rural primary school in California with numerous discipline problems during the 2015-2016 through 2017-2018 school years adopted the Responsive Classroom (RC), a proactive and systemwide approach to improve behavioral and academic outcomes. The purpose of this case study was to identify, explore, and understand the discipline strategies used by primary school educators and their perspectives regarding the RC approach to teaching used at the research site. Bandura's social learning theory was the conceptual framework that informed this study, which suggests that individuals tend to respond to experiences as they perceive them. Seven purposively selected educators were interviewed, and discipline logs, class schedules, and lesson plans documenting morning meetings were reviewed to understand discipline problems prior to and after the implementation of the RC approach. Using content analysis, 7 themes were developed. Participants had positive perspectives about the RC approach in terms of improvement of student behavior and evidence of implementing morning meetings/classroom expectations; however, some reactive discipline practices like detention and office referrals were still being used to address discipline problems. This study contributes to positive social change by providing educators with evidence to inform school discipline practices regarding the importance of using proactive strategies with the goal of decreasing student discipline issues and classroom disruptions, while providing a safe and caring classroom environment where students can focus on learning.

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Dedication

I could not have reached this monumental milestone without the support of my family. I dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Brandon, for always finding the words to encourage me even when I'm difficult. I also dedicate this dissertation to my children, Jalen, Kennedy, and McKinley. They are truly my inspirations and by far my greatest accomplishments. Lastly, this dissertation is dedicated to my mother Mary. Mom, thank you for always instilling in me the importance of education and placing God before all that I do.

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I want to first acknowledge God for allowing me to successfully reach this milestone. I didn't share my journey with most of my family and friends due to fear of failure. Now that I have overcome that fear and completed this journey, I want to acknowledge them for the part they play in my life daily. The phone calls, text messages, and e-mails from my siblings, aunts, cousins, nieces, nephews, and friends provided me ongoing encouragement. Derrick, Terry, Cindy, Kirea, Ladonna, and Stephanie, your encouragement and support mean the world to me. I want to acknowledge Dr. Lorna Gilbert, my friend and mentor. She encouraged me to keep pushing and to never give up. My committee chair, Dr. Kimberley Alkins provided me with timely feedback and encouragement throughout this process. I am forever indebted to those who helped me reach this chapter in my career. I am proud to say, "I finally did it!"

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

As a result of widespread national and local concerns about the lack of discipline and increasing violence in schools across the country, there has been an increase in federal and state legislation requiring proactive strategies to deal with schoolwide discipline (Every Student Succeeds Act [ESSA], 2015). The U.S. Department of Education (ED, 2017) indicated that 49 million students were enrolled in public schools during the 2011-2012 school year. Of those 49 million students, 3.5 million (7.1%) received in school suspensions, 3.45 million (7.0%) received out-of-school suspensions, and 130,000 (.26%) were expelled for disciplinary reasons. Behavior management strategies that are typically used to discipline students have been ineffective in limiting discipline problems and decreasing the number of suspensions and expulsions (Lacoe & Steinberg, 2018). In addition, the number of suspensions and expulsions for African American students represent substantial disparities with a 32 to 42% suspension rate for the subgroup (Office for Civil Rights [OCR], 2017). The suspension and expulsion rates for African American students are three times higher than those for Caucasian students (OCR, 2017).

Losen (2018) also indicated the number of African American students' suspensions and expulsions rates as higher than any other subgroup and concerning. Davis (2014) noted that the school-to-prison pipeline emphasize racial inequalities in discipline practices and the criminalization of youth. Suspensions, expulsions, and school-based arrests are increasingly being used to address discipline infractions. In 2015, several states revised laws relating to suspensions and expulsions limiting the use

of exclusionary discipline practices and implementing supportive discipline strategies that rely on behavioral interventions such as guidance and counseling and dropout prevention for at-risk students (Steinberg & Lacoë, 2017). Punitive practices disrupt students' learning by preventing them from being in the classroom with their teachers and peers. Traditional punitive forms of discipline such as suspensions and expulsions have shown negative effects, such as continued disruptions in the classroom setting, on student outcomes and school climate (Skiba, 2014).

The ESSA mandates specialized instructional support and policies regarding school safety and climate to support the behavioral needs of students, address mental health concerns, and identify and support students considered most at risk of school failure. The ESSA mandates that states include data about school climate and discipline in their yearly state report card made available to the public. The ESSA also requires school districts outline efforts to address issues regarding bullying, harassment, and discipline to ensure that schools are safe and supportive for students to learn and grow.

Researchers investigating proactive approaches to discipline emphasize positive practices for decreasing negative behavior and improving student outcomes. When teachers use proactive behavior management strategies, positive learning environments are created that support the emotional, social, and behavioral needs of their students (Parsonson, 2012). When teachers use strategies such as office referrals that are reactive and result in a student's removal from the classroom, problematic behaviors may escalate (Parsonson, 2012).

The local school, which was the focus of this study, is required to implement a behavior management program as outlined in the ESSA. Several schools in the county, which contains 11 districts, implemented the Responsive Classroom (RC) approach to improve overall behavioral and academic outcomes for students. Providing evidence-based practices to effectively reduce behavioral challenges was an obstacle for the local school staff.

The purpose of this case study was to identify, explore, and understand the discipline strategies being used by teachers and their perspectives of the RC approach that was used at the research school. Data were reviewed to better understand discipline practices and the implementation of the RC approach. Data were gathered from staff including the principal, teachers, and instructional aides at the local school. Chapter 1 includes the background, problem statement, purpose of study, research questions, conceptual framework, nature of study, definitions, assumptions, scopes and delimitations, limitations, and significance of the study.

Background

In 1981, six public school teachers formed the Northeast Foundation for Children (NEFC) and opened a laboratory school in Massachusetts based on the vision of creating positive classrooms and schools that support the emotional, social, behavioral, and academic growth of students (Center for Responsive Schools, 2018a, 2018b). The RC is the name given to the framework by NEFC in 1990 to describe and share the approach with other educators (Center for Responsive Schools, 2018b). The RC program provides professional development to teachers, school staff, and administrators regarding proactive

behavior management techniques (Stearns, 2016). The RC program provides training to educators in the United States and abroad each year (Center for Responsive Schools, 2018a). The RC approach is intended to provide educators with necessary skills to develop caring classrooms and school environments that strengthen classroom instruction, enhance social and emotional skills of students, fosters student and teacher relationships, and enhance students' behavioral, academic, and social outcomes. The NEFC developed the RC approach as a professional development intervention that focuses on developing a nurturing classroom attuned to the needs of individual students (Center for Responsive Schools, 2018a, 2018c). The RC is an approach to teaching based on the belief that students succeed in the classroom when their behavioral, social, academic, and emotional needs are met. According to the NEFC, the RC approach is based on the following principles:

- Social and academic instruction are imperative in developing the curriculum.
- Social interactions and teacher-student and student-student relationships aid cognitive development.
- Students must learn collaboration, empathy, self-control, and be responsible if they are going to be successful.
- Good teaching requires that educators know their students culturally, individually, and developmentally.
- Teachers must realize that how students acquire new learning is just as important as what they learn. (Kriete & Davis, 2014, p. 4)

RC approach principles are grounded on the premise that a strong social-emotional foundation is just as important as academic instruction. The principles are designed to create classrooms conducive to teaching and learning (McTigue & Rimm-Kaufman, 2010). The principles and practices focus on behavioral, social, emotional, and self-regulatory skills as immediate objectives resulting in academic achievement. The RC approach and guiding principles seek to improve students' prosocial behaviors. It was developed to support the social and emotional needs and academic development of students (McTigue & Rimm-Kaufman, 2010; Rimm-Kaufman, 2006). It has been shown to improve teacher effectiveness, increase student achievement, and produce safer learning environments (McTigue & Rimm-Kaufman, 2010; Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2014).

Some specific practices emerge from the RC approach. Some of the practices include morning meetings, rules, proactive discipline, and the use of positive language. Morning meetings are essential to the RC approach. Morning meetings are daily meetings held with students to enhance the classroom environment with time for greetings and sharing. Classroom rules and discipline discussions occur. Rules are established to prevent problem behaviors from occurring and consequences for behaviors are developed and individually relevant to each student. Trust is built to create positive student-teacher and student-student relationships.

The RC approach supports the behavioral, academic, and social-emotional needs of students by proactively dealing with potential behaviors students may exhibit. Students have demonstrated ongoing behavior that is of concern at the school site. This study will address a gap in research based on the lack of a research based on the behavior

management framework and RC approach at the research site. The need for a support system at the research site was identified by the school principal as a result of numerous discipline infractions and lack of teacher training regarding proactive behavior management strategies during the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 school years. Students' behaviors negatively affect their social and emotional growth and interfere with instruction. The RC approach should be effective in improving classroom management and promoting the behavioral, academic, and social-emotional learning needs of all students. In this study, I identified and explored the discipline strategies used by educators and their perspectives of the RC approach used at the research site. The findings could help the school support the ongoing implementation of a school-wide behavior support system as required by the ESSA.

Problem Statement

The educational problem addressed in this study involved numerous discipline infractions such as school bullying, fighting, disrupting instruction, classroom defiance, failure to follow classroom/school rules, and disrespect toward peers and adults at the research school in California during the 2015-2016, 2016-2017, and 2017-2018 school years. Those discipline problems, some of which led to student suspensions, were reported as a concern in a needs assessment completed by the school principal in September 2017 and were based on evidence from teacher reports, student discipline records, teacher logs, and office referrals. The school, county office, and California Department of Education annually collect student office referral and suspension data to monitor school discipline. The data collected at the local school and county level are

reported via a countywide program that school districts use to track student data. The number of office referrals was obtained from the school principal upon approval for this study by the school district and Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB).

The data that are available for public view only contain suspension rates and was provided by the California Department of Education. The research school reported a 0% suspension rate for the 2014-2015 school year. The suspension rate has not been 0% since that school year despite the small size of the school. The research school was identified by the California Department of Education in the 2015-2016 school year as being disproportionate due to the number of suspensions in one or more subgroups. The school had a suspension rate of 5.2% which was higher than the county's suspension rate (3.4%) and higher than the state's suspension rate (3.7%; California Department of Education, 2017a). In addition to the problem at the school site, California Department of Education (2017a) identified 677 of the 1,038 school districts in California as having a disproportionate number of suspensions. The suspension rate at the school site decreased during the 2016-2017 school year but increased again during the 2017-2018 school year at the research site. The school had a suspension rate of 2.8% for the 2016-2017 school year and a suspension rate of 3.0% for the 2017-2018 school year. Suspension data for 2018 to 2019 are not yet available by the California Department of Education.

The research school was a small rural school of 240 students and 18 staff members which included teachers, a librarian, instructional aides, a counselor, a clerk, and the principal during the 2018-2019 school year. Students range in grade from transitional kindergarten designed for four-year-old students to eighth grade. The

research school was the only school in the district. The district was serving as a pilot for a multitiered system of support (MTSS) framework which supports students' social, and behavioral development. Two teachers and the site principal were selected to pilot MTSS during the 2017-2018 school year. The school district was one of 11 school districts in the county. Three others school districts in the county were also selected to pilot MTSS. MTSS is a framework that focuses on Common Core State Standards, academic instruction, differentiation, student-centered learning, individualized student needs, and the alignment of systems necessary for all students' academic, behavioral, and social wellbeing (California Department of Education, 2017b). As a result of being selected as a pilot for MTSS by the County Office of Education, a needs assessment was conducted with the school principal, leadership team, and county office designees in September 2017.

The needs assessment identified key areas of concern and interventions to address those concerns. Of the concerns noted in the needs assessment was a schoolwide need for a uniform behavior policy due to behavior concerns across the school setting and the disproportionality of the number of students suspended identified by the California Department of Education. The needs assessment team identified a lack of consistency in practice which required correcting ongoing behavior concerns as well as a lack of an overall positive behavior model to proactively address behaviors during the 2015-2016, 2016-2017, and 2017-2018 years.

Due to inconsistencies in practice and the lack of an overall behavior system, many disruptive behaviors resulted in students being sent to the office, out of school on

suspension, or losing school privileges. Such practices were not productive and conducive to teaching and learning. Removing students from the learning environment may increase discipline problems and learning gaps for individuals who may be at risk of performing poorly academically and socially (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010). Reactive responses to discipline problems are punitive in nature. Reactive responses involving punishment are not evidence-based and ineffective in terms of classroom management strategies used to address behavioral challenges (Ross & Sliger, 2015). Punishment, according to Ross (2012), represents the least effective method to change student behaviors. Educators use punishment because of its general success in immediately stopping an undesired behavior (Ducharme & Shecter, 2011).

The principal at the research site agreed to the RC approach as a schoolwide intervention to address ongoing behavior concerns. The principal and two teachers piloting MTSS at the school site participated in yearlong staff development on the MTSS framework during the 2017-2018 school year. The pilot staff also practiced components of the RC approach during the 2017-2018 school year. Training for all staff began in March 2018. The RC approach was implemented schoolwide during the school year 2018-2019 school year. Ongoing training and staff development were embedded in school practices which included monthly staff meetings. The RC approach should reduce school discipline concerns by building a climate of cooperation and prosocial skills of students across grade levels. Discipline data for the 2018-2019 school year were collected from the principal but are not yet available for public view.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this case study was to identify, explore, and understand the discipline strategies being used by teachers and staff at the research school and their perspectives on the RC approach. Qualitative data in this case study were collected through interviews and document reviews regarding educators' perspectives on the RC approach. The goal of the study was to provide the local school with evidence to inform school practices and policies on proactive strategies using the RC model to minimize student discipline issues and contribute to the existing research on schoolwide behavior management. Schools must respond to the needs of students by creating nurturing learning environments designed to enhance student achievement and decrease school violence. The RC approach fosters individual students' needs by creating a safe and caring learning environment.

Research Questions

To identify disruptive behaviors and teachers' perspectives regarding the RC approach in the classroom and local school setting I conducted a qualitative study. The research was guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: What do key stakeholders (e.g., teachers, counselors, and administrators) believe are the strengths and areas for improvement of the RC approach?

RQ2: What types of student discipline problems exist in the school?

RQ3: What discipline strategies are teachers currently using?

RQ4: To what extent has the RC approach been implemented as planned?

RQ5: What are staff perspectives of the RC approach?

Conceptual Framework

In response to stricter accountability for student behavior and academic achievement, elementary, middle, and high school educators have attempted to use various interventions aimed at improving school discipline. Some of these have been less effective, whereas others have been more effective. School educators have resorted to the increased use of discipline practices such as suspensions, office referrals, and detention. More effective practices used to address behaviors include programs that teach prosocial behaviors as a classroom management technique, such as the RC approach. Current behavior management practices are more aligned with reactive and punitive responses rather than proactive classroom management strategies such as the RC approach.

This study addressed a gap in research based on the RC approach newly implemented to address behavior concerns exhibited by some students at the school site. I used the social learning theory as the conceptual framework to ground this study. Bandura's social learning theory has been widely used in studies of individuals' behaviors and the consequences that occur from their chosen actions.

According to Bandura (2002), learning and behavior involve a reciprocal interaction between students and teachers that connect cognitive, behavioral, and environmental factors. Social learning theory supports the concept that students must have their social-emotional needs met before they can achieve academically (Bandura, 2002). The possible gap in discipline infractions and teacher training on classroom management or professional development may be attributed to a lack of understanding by staff of the social and emotional needs of students outlined in the social learning theory.

Bandura (1997) stated that behaviors are acquired from surroundings through the process of observation, learning and performance are different, individuals can learn behaviors while they witness them, and perform them at a later time. In summary, in Bandura's social learning theory, he asserts that perceptions affect a person's ideas and beliefs. Bandura (1977) noted that positive perceptions lead to positive cognitive responses which leads to positive performances from individuals. Additional information about the conceptual framework appears in Chapter 2.

Nature of Study

The research design for this study included qualitative data collection and analysis methods based on the research questions. According to Creswell (2012), qualitative methods allow for the exploration of an issue or issues that concern the researcher. The research used a qualitative case study design. The qualitative case study research design is ideal for exploring the perspectives of participants at the local school using the RC approach. Case studies are used when a researcher wishes to examine the specific nature and characteristics of behaviors, processes, relationships, and performances (Yin, 2009). Conducting a case study allowed for an in-depth investigation of the RC phenomenon. The case study approach often relies on a small number of open-ended questions where sample sizes are typically small. Data in case studies may include documents reviews, interviews, observations, and artifacts (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The case study approach allowed me the opportunity to understand the experiences, perspectives, and insights of a case through a personal lens.

For qualitative research, I used individual interviews, classroom level and schoolwide discipline records, and other school documents. The interviews were conducted in a mutually agreed upon setting after students were dismissed. The interviews were questions in the interview guide which were tape recorded and transcribed. Interviews were useful in terms of gathering detailed qualitative information about how the RC approach worked and how the local school district staff perceived it. Document reviews were used to analyze data from records and documents involving implementation of the RC approach in terms of classroom activities, classroom procedures, classroom structure, attendance, discipline referrals, and training materials.

The research was conducted during the 2018-2019 school year. In the study, I examined educators' perspectives regarding implementing the RC approach in the identified research school. The purpose of this study was to identify, explore, and understand discipline practices and educators' perspectives regarding the RC approach.

Definitions

Behavior management: A behavior modification technique that involves schoolwide or classroom interventions to decrease, eliminate, or prevent misbehavior (Martin & Sass, 2010).

Classroom meetings: Specific group norms that involve entire classes and their teachers engaged in problem solving in order to promote the proper socialization of these students (Sorsdahl & Sanche, 1985).

Discipline: The process of adult mentoring in terms of providing direction, guidance, and expected behaviors in the school setting and society (Ross, 2012).

Disruptive behavior: Any action or expression that disrupts instruction by distracting other students in the class (Parker, Nelson, & Burns, 2010).

Punishment: The presentation of a negative reinforcer or the removal of a positive reinforcer. Punishment produces emotional responses that interrupt or interfere with the punished behavior (Vargas, 2013).

Responsive classroom (RC): A research-based approach to teaching that includes 10 practices that help educators develop students' competencies in four main areas: enriching academics, positive environment, effective management, and ongoing developmental awareness (Center for Responsive Schools, 2018c).

Social-emotional learning (SEL): The process in which individuals acquire and successfully use and apply skills, attitudes, and behaviors to understand and manage feelings, develop and accomplish short and long-term goals, exhibit compassion for others, create and sustain relationships, and make good choices (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2015).

Assumptions

In conducting a study on the discipline strategies currently being used by teachers and staff perspectives regarding the RC approach, I made several assumptions. I assumed that all teachers were accurately documenting behavior concerns in the classroom. I assumed that the principal was accurately reporting discipline in the required database used by schools and districts to report discipline. I assumed that teachers at the local school answered the interview questions based on their unbiased knowledge and experiences in the classroom related to student discipline. I also assumed that staff

responses accurately reflected the level of implementation of the RC approach. I also assumed that staff members were implementing the RC approach with fidelity.

Scope and Delimitations

This qualitative study was delimited with regard to sampling. The participants in this study were teachers and staff from a single school district that consisted of one school. The sample included teachers at each grade level. Participants responded to questions regarding their current discipline practices and perspectives of the implementation of the RC approach. The scope of this study was limited to teachers' perspectives of disruptive behaviors in the classroom and school setting. Due to the small size of the school, transferability may be an issue. Additional information regarding transferability will be discussed in Chapter 3.

Limitations

There were also some limitations in this study. One limitation was the sample size. The school was a small rural school with a migrant population of about 240 students and one to two teachers per grade level. Determining the consistency of the RC approach program and the usefulness of its principles and practices may lead to some difficulties in terms of continuity because some students leave for several months during the school year due to migrant status. Another limitation was generalizability. The study was conducted at a single district consisting of a single transitional K-8 site implementing the RC approach. The behavior at the site may not mirror the behavior at similar sites which may restrict the generalizability of results. In a qualitative study, replication of findings may also be difficult to achieve. Teachers' discipline practices often vary from class to

class and grade level to grade level. The lack of direct control over the fidelity of implementation of the RC approach may also affect results.

Significance

School discipline practices such as suspension often result in negative consequences. According to the ED (2017), 3.5 million students enrolled in public schools during the 2011-2012 school year were suspended. Current discipline trends reflect a persistent use of reactive strategies to address disciplinary infractions whether they are minor or major (OCR, 2017). Educators' use of punitive responses to discipline was evident at the local school and was identified as an area of improvement on the needs assessment. Educators at the school in which the study took place identified their need for a proactive behavior intervention policy due to ongoing behavior concerns and a lack of established guidelines or practices related to addressing school discipline. To improve upon current practices, teachers and staff agreed to exchange inconsistent reactive and punitive responses with proactive measures that emphasized evidence-based strategies to promote prosocial skills. This study has the potential to expand the literature on the RC approach program in a small school setting that incorporates effective evidence-based practices grounded in theories of social-emotional learning and academic development. It will also provide useful feedback about the classroom and school climate through implementation of identified interventions that positively influence teacher practices, student outcomes, and the classroom environment.

A large body of research exists on proactive behavior management and the RC approach. Although existing research is available regarding the RC approach, the current

study adds to the field in terms of examining schools with a small number of students and teachers' perspectives of the implementation of the RC approach. The current study represents an effort to provide additional qualitative data to the body of research regarding staff perspectives of the RC approach in relation to student outcomes, peer interactions, teacher relationships, and overall prosocial behaviors.

Summary

Implementing proactive strategies such as the RC approach to effectively and proactively manage disruptive behaviors may lead to better student outcomes and a positive school climate. Disruptive behavior continues to be an area of concern for schools. Increasingly, educators are spending more time managing discipline and correcting disruptive behavior, which interferes with teaching and learning. Classrooms should be conducive to learning and free of disruptions. Schools should establish a culture where students feel safe and are developed academically, socially, and emotionally. The ESSA requires schools to implement evidence-based practices to deal with schoolwide discipline. Effective and preventative methods are required to address student misbehavior.

This chapter included a description of the target school in the study. Background information was also included with a summary of the RC approach. There were five research questions addressed in this study. The conceptual framework for this study was Bandura's social learning theory. I also reviewed research involving the problem of discipline and implementation of proven research-based interventions. In Chapter 2, I presented a review of the literature related to the RC approach. In reviewing the

literature, I focused on disruptive behaviors, reactive behavior techniques, and proactive behavior interventions. I conducted an in-depth investigation of the conceptual framework supporting the RC approach. I also identified discipline practices and interventions used at the school site.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Several policies have called for the implementation of alternative disciplinary measures that allow students to remain in school and not miss important classroom instruction. Increasing concerns by educators about school safety and student discipline have led to the development of numerous policies in schools and school districts related to discipline. The ESSA included provisions ensuring schools focus on the most needy students, and in turn allow students more time to learn and educators more time to teach. Stough, Montague, Landmark, and Williams-Diehm (2015) asserted that teachers regularly indicate classroom management as a major concern, especially new teachers. Behavior management approaches often rely on reactive policies based on a set of defined rules and consequences instead of proactive and systematic approaches to support students in terms of developing positive behavior outcomes. As more schools use a MTSS to address the needs of students, school leaders are rethinking discipline policies and practices.

Due to the number of reported discipline infractions nationwide (10.81% of student population), it is evident that the needs of students are not always addressed appropriately. Behavior management approaches do not always address behaviors in a proactive way while meeting the social-emotional needs of students. Students benefit from concise rules and consequences regarding behavior expectations; however, such approaches are short term and reactive, only managing behaviors in the moment (Nash, Schlösser, & Scarr, 2016).

At the school being studied, the principal identified the problem of a growing number of discipline infractions such as bullying, defiance, and failure to follow classroom/school rules. The principal and the teachers in the local school identified the lack of consistency in practice prior to the implementation of the RC approach to address behavior concerns. The purpose of this study was to identify, explore, and understand the discipline strategies used by teachers at the research school and the staff's perspectives on the implementation of the RC approach. The study will also add to an existing body of research on the RC approach.

In Chapter 2, I discussed research related to disruptive behaviors, zero tolerance policies, discipline practices, proactive discipline strategies, schoolwide positive behavior supports, and prior research regarding the RC approach. This study will address a gap in research in student discipline based on discipline data and the implementation of the RC approach. I identified and explored discipline strategies and ascertained professional perspectives regarding the implementation of the RC approach at the local school.

Literature Search Strategy

To find relevant literature, I used the Walden University Library to conduct an in-depth search of the databases including EBSCOHost, Academic Search Premier, Academic Search Complete, Academic Search Alumni Edition, Education Research Complete, Education Source, ERIC, SAGE, PsycARTICLES, and PsycINFO. There were an extensive number of dissertations, books, and articles published between 2010 and 2019. By searching scholarly databases, I limited my focus to relevant terms. Priority was given to peer-reviewed articles published between 2014 and 2019, but research published

before 2014 was also considered and included based on relevance to the topic. Also, I used archival data from California Department of Education and Google Scholar. To identify literature related to the study, I used the following key research terms: *student behavior, Responsive Classroom, classroom disruptions, punishment, social emotional learning, student discipline, classroom behaviors, and classroom management.*

Conceptual Framework

The theory used to support this study is Bandura's social learning theory. Bandura (1977) asserted that individuals learn and acquire behaviors by observing the behaviors and attitudes of others. According to Bandura (1977), children can learn behaviors rapidly and efficiently by observing others who model behaviors. Meeting the social-emotional needs of students begins with positive classroom management. The RC approach could be implemented as a proactive classroom management strategy to meet the social, behavioral, and emotional needs of students as defined by Bandura's social learning theory. Instead, educators are using reactive and punitive methods to address students' misbehavior.

In Bandura's social learning theory, he identifies individual's need for understanding the social-emotional needs of others and the importance of providing intervention strategies (Bandura, 1997). Individuals are neither autonomous nor automatic respondents to environmental influences but tend to respond to experiences as they perceive them (Bandura, 1997). Students are likely to respond to the classroom and school environment as they perceive it. In understanding and using the social learning theory, teachers and schools develop a classroom setting in which a student can feel

supported academically, socially, and emotionally. Given the mandate in federal and state legislation requiring proactive strategies to deal with schoolwide discipline under the ESSA, schools and districts should seek interventions that promote a positive school culture as defined by the social learning theory.

Bandura (1989) asserted that individuals must have a strong sense of self-worth to sustain efforts required to be successful. Students must have their social-emotional needs met before they can achieve academically (Bandura, 2002). The RC approach is designed to help teachers develop nurturing classroom environments to proactively deal with discipline through training them to use social emotional learning and supporting practices. The social learning theory can help educators understand behaviors displayed by students and address behaviors requiring discipline via the RC approach. This study identified discipline practices, consequences, and staff perspectives involving the RC approach.

Bandura (1989) asserted the individual's need for understanding others and the importance of individuals having a strong sense of self-worth to feel successful. In a classroom where teachers implement and build a strong social emotional foundation incorporating the RC approach, teachers create a classroom environment in which students feel nurtured academically, socially, and behaviorally. Additionally, when teachers feel competent in teaching, they may hold a higher degree of confidence in terms of teaching and a sense of accomplishment when attempting to reach the needs of students (Gutshall, 2013). Teachers also feel a sense of self-efficacy in terms of their teaching practices when the needs of students are met.

The social learning theory helps educators understand the importance of providing social-emotional support to students. Miller and Morris (2016) examined the influence of peer relations online versus face-to-face interactions on college students' participation in digital piracy versus traditional deviant behaviors (e.g., bullying, purposely assaulting someone) over a 12-month period using the social learning theory. The students ($n = 454$) in this survey research were asked how often they had participated in these behaviors in the 12 months prior to taking the survey as well as the likelihood that they would commit these acts within the next 12 months. Students were asked a series of questions about their peers' behavior during the previous 12 months, distinguished by either face-to-face peers or fully online peers (Miller & Morris, 2016). The participants indicated that virtual peer relationships were just as important as face-to-face relationships (Miller & Morris, 2016). Although this research was conducted with college students, it shows the importance of peer relationships as defined by Bandura's social learning theory in which he stated that learning and behavior are a reciprocal interaction.

Brock (2013) used Bandura's social learning theory to understand behavior expectations and to help determine the effectiveness of a bullying prevention program at the elementary study site. Social learning theory is widely used as a theoretical foundation for implementing positive behavior supports to address students' behavior in the school setting (Farmer et al., 2014). Chin, Dowdy, Jimerson, and Rime (2012) indicated the importance of understanding the principles of social learning theory as it relates to reinforcement systems when researching a school-wide positive behavior support initiative from a case study conducted at a small elementary school with

predominately Latino students. In the study a program was piloted with students from families of low-socioeconomic backgrounds. When students demonstrated behaviors that would typically warrant a suspension according to the school's discipline policy, social-emotional training was implemented to replace the suspension. The results of the study yielded a reduction in suspensions compared with previous years. The study supports the use of a proactive learning approach to behavior problems that could potentially replace punitive school discipline practices that are common in schools and classrooms nationwide.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts and Variable

The RC approach is intended to provide educators with skills and knowledge needed to create a nurturing, well-managed classroom that ultimately strengthens instruction and students' social, behavioral, and academic outcomes (Baroody, Rimm-Kaufman, Larsen, & Curby, 2014). In response to stricter accountability for student behavior and academic achievement, schools must adopt interventions targeted at improving discipline. Some discipline practices such as suspensions have been less effective, whereas others have been more effective. For this literature review, I review disruptive behaviors in schools, research on punitive discipline practices such as suspensions, and finally explore positive behavior supports like the RC approach.

Disruptive Behaviors

Disruptive behavior interferes with the flow of instruction by disturbing other students in the class or school setting (Watson et al., 2016). Some disruptive behavior, such as rule-breaking may be common among children. However, extreme and persistent

disruptive behaviors place students at a greater risk of negative outcomes later in life (Kaminski & Claussen, 2017). Disruptive behaviors displayed by students in the school setting and classroom can have many undesirable effects on teachers and students (Narhi, Kiiski, Peitso, & Savolainen, 2015). Several researchers agree that disruptive behavior is one of the greatest challenges educators face in the school setting, as well as a major concern and source of stress for teachers and students (Greene, 2014; Nash et al., 2016; Woltering & Qinxin, 2016). Teachers' disciplinary strategies influence student behaviors. Classrooms with effective management and positive support systems are essential in deterring disruptive behaviors that interfere with student achievement (Garwood & Vernon-Feagans, 2017).

Students demonstrating disruptive classroom behaviors may influence the classroom environment, increasing negative peer relations (Ray, Thornton, Frick, Steinberg, & Cauffman, 2015; Wymbs et al., 2012). Shin and Ryan (2017) examined peer influence of fifth and sixth grade students that were considered either low or high in emotional support from teachers over a 6-month period. Students were less likely to mimic disruptive behaviors demonstrated by their classroom peers when emotional relationship support and a positive classroom climate were provided by the classroom teacher. Shin and Ryan suggest that teachers greatly enhance the effect on peer relationships in the school and classroom setting by providing a positive and supportive classroom environment for their students. Müller, Hofmann, Begert, and Cillessen (2018) attempted to replicate the study conducted by Shin and Ryan by investigating how students perceived support from their classroom teachers and their academic needs.

Müller et al. (2018) investigated teachers' differentiation strategies and how students' perceptions teachers' instructional strategies were associated with classmates' influence on disruptive behaviors in the classroom. Müller et al. found, in classrooms viewed as less supportive by students, disruptive behaviors were longitudinally associated with greater risks for disruptive behaviors in adolescence. The findings indicate that classroom teachers viewed as less supportive by students resulted in higher levels of disruptive behaviors which was a predictor of increased negative student behaviors as students progressed through grade levels (Müller et al., 2018).

Müller et al. (2018) asserted that their findings support Shin and Ryan (2017). That is, in classrooms identified as having more teacher support, there is less undesirable peer influence on behaviors. This replication is important given that both sets of researchers investigated similar questions and yielded similar results in that teachers' behavior influence classroom climate and social interaction. Müller et al. refer to the effect teachers' behaviors have on students' behavior as the "invisible hand" (p. 106).

Teachers most frequently identify verbal classroom disruptions, noncompliant behaviors, and off-task type behaviors as challenging behaviors (Alter, Walker, & Landers, 2013). A student's disruptive behaviors may also influence his or her academic engagement in the classroom and may reduce his or her academic achievement (Marin & Filce, 2013). Students demonstrating disruptive behaviors at an early age may potentially have difficulties in future development (LeGray, Dufrene, Sterling-Turner, Olmi, & Bellone, 2010; McLeod et al., 2017). When students are noncompliant and disruptive,

teachers must engage in discipline issues of classroom management that may reduce instructional time.

Zimmermann, Schütte, Taskinen, and Köller (2013) found that disruptive classroom behavior was particularly harmful with regard to student performance in math with lasting effects. In the longitudinal research study of 1,045 junior high school students Zimmerman et al. investigated the relationship between externalizing problematic behavior (aggressive and delinquent behaviors measured using teacher report forms), self-esteem (measured using Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale), and academic achievement in math and reading (measured using standardized tests, and student report card grades in math only). Zimmerman et al. found a small but significant effect of externalizing problems on math report card grades repeatedly over time. Additionally, worse grades led to increased externalizing behaviors over time. And finally, externalizing problems were predicted by low self-esteem in early adolescence. This research adds to the body of literature supporting the correlation between problematic behavior and academic achievement. When students are disruptive in class, they miss out on needed skills, which may impede their ability to keep up with classroom instruction presented by the teacher over time.

High rates of disruptive behavior in the school environments are linked to less on task student behavior and decreased instructional time for teachers (Moore et al., 2017). Students who present behavioral challenges are more likely to spend time off task affecting their academic performance. Student misbehavior often results in decreased academic performance and the decreased ability of teachers to effectively manage their

classrooms (Mitchell & Bradshaw, 2013). Students displaying disruptive behaviors are at-risk for poor academic outcomes and school failure. Several researchers have analyzed the effects of disruptive behaviors and how it adversely affects student learning and academic achievement (LeGray et al., 2010; Marin & Filce, 2013; Robers, Kemp, & Truman, 2013; Zimmermann et al., 2013)

Disruptive classroom and school behaviors may result in loss of classroom instruction and declines in student performance (Godwin, Almeda, Petroccia, Baker, & Fisher, 2013). Godwin et al. (2013) purported that there has been little research on the factors contributing to off-task behavior in the classroom. The study was one of the first large-scale studies exploring how students in the elementary school setting sustain their attention in the classroom environment and how patterns of attention seeking behavior change as a function of grade level, teacher presentation, and gender. Godwin et al. found that teacher presentation was related to off-task behavior in elementary school students. The findings indicate that teacher presentation enhanced focused attention in classroom settings. Teacher presentation is strongly related to relationship building. Conversely, Godwin et al. found that certain types of teacher presentation (i.e., poor classroom management) were associated with more off-task behavior leading to classroom disruptions. Disruptive behaviors displayed by students usually result in students being removed from class (Gut & McLaughlin, 2012; Slaten, Irby, Tate, & Rivera, 2015). Students removed from class regularly may have difficulty meeting standards due to missed instructional time.

While many education policies are aimed at increasing student achievement, since the late 1990s increased attention has been given to policies that aim to reduce school violence given the rise in school shootings. One of those policies was zero tolerance. Understanding zero-tolerance policy practices and resulting behaviors is imperative in developing and implementing positive behavior interventions. The zero-tolerance policy was intended to eliminate individual students who were identified as a danger to a school setting (Alnaim, 2018).

Zero-Tolerance Policies in Response to Disruptive Behavior

The increase in school violence particularly the media attention given to shootings in schools in the 1990s led to federal and state zero-tolerance policies (Sheras & Bradshaw, 2016). The zero-tolerance policy concept was adopted by schools in the early 1990s requiring schools to enforce specific rules and consequences relating to disruptive behaviors. Some of the consequences were often viewed as being rigid, insensitive, severe, reactive, and punitive in nature, without first considering the severity of the behavior or the context in which the behavior occurred (Castillo, 2014). Zero-tolerance policies were aimed at decreasing negative behaviors (Moreno & Scaletta, 2018). Zero-tolerance policies define certain behaviors that result in automatic school suspensions or expulsions. Some of the behaviors resulting in suspensions or expulsions include weapons, fighting, and bullying (Kafka, 2011; Thompson, 2016).

There is limited empirical research on the effectiveness of zero-tolerance policies. The American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force conducted a comprehensive review of zero tolerance policies in 2005 (American Psychological

Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008). The task force aimed to measure the zero tolerance policies' effectiveness on making schools safer for students and if the policies decreased instances of disruptive school behaviors. The task force found that zero tolerance policies failed at an attempt to create schools that were safe for students and promote positive learning environments. The task force found that zero tolerance policies needed to be modified from a one size fits all approach and that such policies should only be used for severe disruptive behaviors. The task force recommended that behavior intervention policies require alternatives before suspension or expulsion, including preventative measures and increase in staff development in culturally responsive training and behavior management.

Sheras and Bradshaw (2016) also noted that zero-tolerance policies focus on student violence and safe schools and have received a prodigious amount of attention. Zero-tolerance policies are restrictive and do not allow administrators to use discretion in addressing discipline by utilizing positive or proactive alternatives likely to benefit students (Buckmaster, 2016). Gonzales (2013) also indicated that far more students were suspended or expelled under the adoption of zero tolerance policies that were initially designed for serious offenses such as the possession of drugs and weapons. Despite the widespread use of zero-tolerance policies, there was mounting concern among educators that zero-tolerance policies were more harmful than good (DeMitchell & Hambacher, 2016).

Curran (2016) used data from surveys conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics, the OCR data collection, and data drawn from archival searches of

state law to measure the effect of state zero-tolerance policies on suspension rates and principal perceptions of problem behaviors. Curran found that state zero tolerance laws predict an increased use of suspensions and limited decreases in school leaders' perceptions of problem behaviors. While several researchers found that zero tolerance policies did not always work and were exclusionary in practice (Buckmaster, 2016; DeMitchell & Hambacher, 2016; Sheras & Bradshaw, 2016), Lacoé and Steinberg (2018) found that alternative methods of dealing with discipline following zero tolerance were not as successful as policy makers had hoped for. The empirical study was conducted on Philadelphia's reformed discipline policy following zero tolerance. The reformed policy aimed at limiting suspensions for nonviolent student behavior giving principals more discretion in implementing consequences. Lacoé and Steinberg found that differing approaches to discipline resulted in only a modest decline in suspensions for nonviolent infractions in the initial year the reformed policy was implemented. Lacoé and Steinberg recommended that policy makers closely look at policies and its implications on student outcomes.

With the adoption of ESSA (2015) the U.S. Department of Education announced a shift in policies such as the zero tolerance policies and practices, however, many schools rely on approaches following spikes in disruptive behaviors and school violence, such as those involving bullying, weapons, or assault to others, possibly due the public's perception that other responses to out of school suspension or expulsion are not rigorous and do not effectively address school violence. Sheras and Bradshaw (2016) noted the importance of not looking at the failures of zero-tolerance policies, but rather what

completely removing zero-tolerance policies has made possible for schools. Zero tolerance policies led to the development of more consistent, preventive, proactive, and less punitive uniform practices aimed at improving overall school climate.

Although zero tolerance policies were adopted by most public schools in the 1990s, Skiba (2014) suggested that punishment-based policies such as zero tolerance do not teach the behaviors that will improve school and classroom discipline and ultimately develop a community of responsible self-governing students. Data on zero policy reform seem to support this viewpoint (Skiba, 2014). Zero-tolerance policies were adopted by 90% of the nation's public schools by 1997, but strategies that build positive behaviors among students remained underutilized (Skiba, 2014). Educators and administrators were more likely to use zero-tolerance policy practices when disciplining students when classroom management practices were not efficient (Henson, 2012). Zero tolerance policies do not allow administrators to use discretion in addressing student discipline and implementing best practice that would benefit students (Buckmaster, 2016). However, Lacoë and Steinberg (2018) found that when administrators used discretion, consequences varied significantly and did not always lead to positive change.

Less Effective Discipline Practices

Teacher variation in interventions to disruptive behaviors is a challenge to school improvement efforts as well (Bryk, 2015). Many practices may be punitive in nature. Punitive discipline approaches, like zero tolerance policies, are ineffective because such approaches miss the opportunity to support and help students in understanding how to behave in a positive manner (Lane, Menzies, Ennis, & Oakes, 2015). Behavior

management approaches often follow a set of rules, consequences, and rewards to address behaviors, which all teachers, staff, and students are expected to follow (Rogers, 2012; Rogers, 2015). School discipline systems often involve the use of punishment or disciplinary procedures aimed at decreasing unwanted student behaviors rather than proactively managing student behaviors. Educators use punishment because of its general success in immediately stopping an undesired behavior (Talvio, Lonka, Komulainen, Kuusela, & Lintunen, 2015). Traditional punitive forms of discipline have shown negative effects on student outcomes and school climate (Skiba, 2014). Current trends in addressing school discipline reflect a persistent use of reactive strategies to address behavior infractions (OCR, 2017).

Other practices educators often use to manage student behaviors may include praise, alternative school placements, student conferencing, and parent contact. Such practices are thought to be reactive and may only serve to decrease behaviors temporarily or for short amounts of time (Freeman et al., 2016). For example, Nixon (2014) found that contacting parents may help decrease disruptive student behavior in the classroom once the behavior has become evident. Nixon reviewed the literature on cyberbullying and the effects on mental health. According to the study, students who are bullied display increased depressive affect, loneliness, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and somatic types of behavior. Nixon goes on to indicate that individuals who bully are more likely to display aggression and delinquent types of behaviors. Nixon suggested that initiating parental contact prior to a student's display of disruptive behavior may help prevent the behavior from manifesting in additional disruptive behaviors. Nixon also suggested that when

teachers develop relationships with parents, students are more inclined to display positive behaviors but the effects are not long term.

Hildenbrand and Arndt (2016) found that praise may decrease instances of disruptive behavior, however students rarely receive praise. Rather than using praise, teachers often reprimand students for disruptive behaviors (Hildenbrand & Arndt, 2016). Talking to students privately about their disruptive behavior may temporarily decrease disruptive behavior because students do not react positively to public reprimand (Lewis, Roache, & Romi, 2011). Kritsonis (2014) asserted that when teachers conference with students privately, the teacher may discover the object of the acting out behavior.

Often, students in the secondary school setting that are considered at risk are also referred to alternative school placements (Herndon, Bembenutty, & Gill, 2015).

Alternative schools are designed for students with poor grades, negative behaviors, or chronic absenteeism (Putwain, Nicholson, & Edwards, 2016). Reactive techniques such as suspensions, alternative school placements, time-outs, and office referrals result in little to no change in the overall school climate. Reactive responses to disruptive school and classroom behaviors can adversely affect the educational environment and increase potential for academic failure (Gage, Sugai, Lewis, & Brzozowy, 2015). Gage et al. (2015) noted that such reactive methods of discipline were related to increased student defiance, aggression, antisocial behavior, and a greater risk of developing issues related to mental health such as anxiety, depressed mood, and overall concerning behaviors. Hannah (2013) asserted that teachers who utilize traditional classroom management

techniques such as office referrals resulting in suspensions are usually not effective in changing the student's behavior.

Mendez and Knoff (2003) found that suspension was used more often than many other common forms of discipline in U.S. public schools. African American students are significantly overrepresented when the suspension data were compared to other ethnic groups. Suspensions were not effective in reducing chronic inappropriate behaviors and were directly related to poor academic performance by these students (Mendez & Knoff, 2003). Martinez, McMahon, and Treger (2016) examined the number of school office referrals in certain student groups in an urban school district. The study particularly supports the study conducted by Mendez and Knoff (2003) and data from the Office for Civil Rights (2017) as it relates to the disparity of suspension in African American students. Martinez et al. (2016) found over representation in high poverty urban school districts among minority groups, resulting in more exclusionary discipline practices for students. The disparity lead to absenteeism from the learning environment due to excessive suspensions or expulsions. Chronic absenteeism lead to decreased learning opportunities.

Individuals advocating for discipline reform measures often argue that suspensions are biased because minority students and students served in special education suspended more than nonminority or general education students. Advocates for discipline reform assert that reducing suspensions would improve school climate for all students (Lane et al., 2015). Although alternative methods to discipline such as praise, parental

contact and student conferencing are used, they are viewed as reactive and do not always rely on a larger behavior.

Suspensions and expulsions are largely ineffective in improving student behavior. There is a negative correlation between suspensions, expulsions, and academic achievement in the school setting. Less effective discipline practices, such as in-school suspension, expulsions, or detention negatively affect academic performance (Fanion, 2013). Suspensions are used to eliminate perceived troublemakers. Eliminating perceived troublemakers from the school setting does not improve school climate (Noltemeyer, Ward, & Mcloughlin, 2015).

Proactive Discipline Strategies

Several behavior management systems built upon a strong framework by schools emerged following zero tolerance policies involving approaches aimed at improving the school climate through evidence-based practices intended to enhance student behaviors that teach prosocial skills. Proactive classroom management strategies help educators create safe learning environments that help students overcome challenges, enhance learning, and foster growth, behaviorally and academically (Chan, 2016). A positive school environment should be adopted through a culture of mutual respect and proactive measures by staff to improve student outcomes (Mitchell & Bradshaw, 2013). The goal of proactive classroom management techniques is to change students' behavior by keeping them on task and minimizing the number of distractions in the classroom (Thornton, 2015). Students should be provided positive behavior supports with the same

rigor and approach as academic curriculum, so that they understand behavioral expectations (Swain-Bradway, Swoszowski, Boden, & Sprague, 2013).

Banks (2014) described proactive behavior management strategies such as classroom arrangement, classroom rules, teacher relationship, and peer modeling to prevent disruptive behaviors designed to prevent disruptive classroom behaviors. The approaches presented by Banks are described as proactive interventions teachers can use to minimize the occurrence of problematic behaviors. The implementation of antecedent procedures is the first element of a successful classroom management program (Banks, 2014).

In this study, I included the perspectives of other school staff personnel in addition to classroom teachers. Several researchers have looked beyond teachers and consulted other educational professionals to understand the fidelity of implementation of schoolwide behavior interventions (Banks, 2014; Chan, 2016; Sheras & Bradshaw, 2016). Filter, Sytsma, and McIntosh (2016) found that the perceptions of teachers and classified staff differed on responses to the effectiveness of a schoolwide positive behavior plan. A scale was used a scale to measure staff commitment in implementing PBIS and responses were gathered from 1,218 staff and teachers utilizing PBIS. Special education teachers reported the highest level of buy in while classified staff (e.g., office support staff, paraprofessionals, and general support staff) reported significantly lower levels of buy-in than all other groups. Feuerborn, Tyre, and Beaudoin (2018) indicated the importance for staff to understand the implications of ineffective schoolwide discipline. In a mixed-methods study, Feuerborn et al. (2018) compared the perceptions

of classified school staff who work directly with students in roles that they are not required to be certified (e.g., paraeducator, recess supervisor, front office staff) to teachers and qualitatively delved deeper into the perceptions of the classified staff of implementation of schoolwide positive behavior interventions and supports (SWPBIS). The results of the study were reported as classified staff and teachers support SWPBIS and less than 6% of classified staff and teachers group reported disagreement with SWPBIS. Teachers and classified staff support and investment in SWPBIS are consistent with the findings of Filter et al. Both studies provide insight on other staff members' perspectives on schoolwide discipline and proactive interventions.

Classroom management is about more than the teachers' ability to get students to follow a prescribed set of rules. Classroom management is about teaching and the teacher's capacity to produce a positive learning environment and experience for students (Milner, 2014; Silva, Negreiros, & Albano, 2017). Classroom management is also about students' opportunities for success. Successful learning opportunities based on evidence-based practices allow for positive interactions that help shape what happens in the school setting and beyond.

Classrooms that are managed well have been associated with self-regulatory skills, higher levels of engagement, increased motivation, and enhanced language and literacy skills (Rimm-Kaufman & Hulleman, 2015). Evidence-based practices that support the classroom, school culture, and prosocial behaviors positively enhance the overall school environment. Schoolwide efforts to promote prosocial behaviors, social-emotional learning, high expectations for student achievement, and positive school

climate have led to positive behavioral and learning outcomes for students and thus should be a focus when developing and implementing policies related to student discipline (Sheras & Bradshaw, 2016).

Teachers can effectively manage behaviors proactively. However, classroom and school misbehaviors may still occur. When misbehaviors occur, teachers can respond in a variety of ways (Garrett, 2014). Ignoring minor misbehaviors can be an effective response. Nonverbal cues may also be effective. Some nonverbal cues may include using proximity, making eye contact, and acknowledging good behavior by other students. Garrett (2014) recommended maintaining the classroom instruction to minimize misbehavior.

Eleven states now have adopted state mandated social emotional learning (SEL) policies in place (Dusenbury et al., 2015). In a study on SEL, Bear, Whitcomb, Elias, and Blank (2015) noted that one of the primary goals of SEL is the prevention of behavior problems. SEL approaches such as the RC approach help students develop social and emotional competence of self-discipline so that they are inclined to govern themselves while in school and later on in life. If students are provided appropriate social-emotional support, the skills learned will lead to life-long positive outcomes.

Schoolwide Positive Support Systems

More and more schools are addressing the academic, social-emotional, and behavior needs of students by adopting a MTSS. A major component of MTSS is a schoolwide positive behavior support system such as the RC approach. Schoolwide positive behavior support systems focus on the use of universal, targeted supports for all

students that encourage positive social, emotional, and behavioral growth in (Tyre, Feuerborn, & Woods, 2018). The MTSS framework creates a positive, safe, and productive school environment for students and staff rather than relying on reactive techniques with a prescribed set of rules and consequences. Reactive approaches may leave students and teachers at a disadvantage. MTSS employs strategies that include a schoolwide plan for teaching, reinforcing student expectations, implementing social - emotional supports, data driven decisions, positive behavior supports, and a hierarchy of intensifying supports for students with increasingly demanding needs (Lane et al., 2015; Lewis, Mitchell, Trussell, & Newcomer, 2015).

Conversely, Harn, Basaraba, Chard, and Fritz (2015) conducted a longitudinal study of the implementation of a MTSS framework in two school districts researching the acceleration of 84 first graders until the end of third grade considered at-risk for reading. The school had strong positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS). Tiered interventions were provided to students. Harn et al. found that even with intensive support and a strong behavior foundation, students did not demonstrate significant growth in reading. In earlier research, Spencer (2013) found a significant decrease in the number of discipline referrals with the effective use of PBIS. While many studies support MTSS (Harlacher, Sakelaris, & Kattelman, 2013; Mitchell & Bradshaw, 2013), Harn et al. found that students did not make significant academic improvement even with intensive supports.

Several policies have been initiated to improve overall school safety and climate and are identified under the MTSS framework which includes improving outcomes for

students by focusing on the behavior, social-emotional, and academic needs of students (Mitchell & Bradshaw, 2013). MTSS uses evidence-based practices based on tiered levels of support designed to support the needs all students (Harlacher et al., 2013). Tier 1 is a schoolwide approach based on a universal design for all students. Tier 1 defines behavioral, social-emotional, and academic expectations for all students (Horner, Sugai, & Fixsen, 2017). Tier 2 supports are targeted supports provided to students that may be at risk academically or behaviorally, requiring a mild level of intervention. Tier 2 interventions are often delivered to students in small groups but can be individual. (Bruhn, Lane, & Hirsch, 2014). Tier 3 interventions are specially designed for students not responding to Tier 1 and 2 interventions. Tier 3 interventions are for students that are considered most at risk for school failure. Interventions are intensive and individualized (Gage, Lewis, & Stichter, 2012). In all three tiers, decision making is guided by data with the goal of improving overall student outcomes.

Through tiered interventions, instruction is designed to support the behavioral, academic, and social-emotional needs of students (Gamm et al., 2012). When teachers use proactive, evidence-based interventions, students are more likely to demonstrate success socially, behaviorally, and academically (States, Detrich, & Keyworth, 2012). MTSS is designed to build a framework supporting classrooms for academic, social-emotional and behavior success of students and in prevent various learning and behavioral problems from occurring. Through a strong social-emotional foundation such as the RC approach, educators in the school setting work together to create a positive behavior support system that states clear and concise behavioral expectations, identifies

when students meet behavioral expectations, and uses data-driven decision making by teachers and administrators.

While Baroody et al. (2014) strongly supported the efficacy of the RC approach, Stearns (2016) disputed the efficacy of the RC approach and argued that the RC approach is not a social-emotional tool. Stearns questioned the definition of prosocial behaviors indicating that the RC approach fails to define what prosocial behaviors look like. Stearns went on to state that the reported effectiveness is only measured by teachers' reports on student behaviors, and no observational data or interviews with students or families on the efficacy of the program exist. Stearns defined the RC approach as a prepackaged social-emotional program that simply cannot adequately allow for the complexity of social-emotional life experiences.

Strong social emotional programs are reported to benefit students. Mitchell and Bradshaw (2013) found that positive behavior supports as a preventative measure in supporting students in elementary and high school and secondary school settings have demonstrated that schools employing positive behavior supports have a substantial decrease in office referrals and suspensions. Nocera, Whitbread, and Nocera (2014) conducted a study on positive behavior supports in middle schools measuring the effectiveness of the implementation of a schoolwide positive behavior support system. They concluded that the results of a schoolwide framework for addressing behaviors proactively led to a decrease in referrals due to discipline concerns and a substantial increase on school climate and academic outcomes of students. Interviews with school staff were thematically coded and analyzed by the researchers. Data were collected over a

period of 3 years from the climate survey and discipline referrals at the local school cited in the study. The number of referrals related to discipline decreased by 36%, the number of suspensions decreased by 38% while school climate and student behavior improved (Nocera et al., 2014).

Baroody et al. (2014) noted that the RC approach also has the potential to enhance teacher-student relationships because it assists teachers in developing a nurturing classroom environment to meet the needs of individual students. The research study was designed to determine the degree to which RC training enhances teacher-student relationships as well as negative peer relations. Baroody et al. found that teachers who receive RC training increased their use of RC practices which increased positive relationships and interaction with and among their students.

Rimm-Kaufman et al. (2014) conducted a study on the efficacy over a 3-year period of the RC approach funded by the U.S. Department of Education (ED) involving 24 schools. The schools were randomly selected for the study and either intervention or control groups. The research followed 350 teachers and 2,904 students from their second grade until fifth grade year. Rimm-Kaufman et al. (2014) found that teachers' use of the RC approach resulted in academic achievement and improved student-teacher interactions. Rivers, Brackett, Reyes, Elbertson, and Salovey (2013) noted that relationships between a child, his teachers, and classmates at school encourage the prosocial skills of the child in accordance with societal the values, norms, and belief.

Pianta, Hamre, and Allen (2012) indicated that when teachers create a positive classroom where students can laugh and play together while working yields a positive

classroom environment that is conducive to learning and building relationships and learning. In a study conducted by Abry, Hulleman, and Rimm-Kaufman (2015), teachers in third and fourth grade implementing the RC approach with fidelity were found to have greater quality student-teacher interactions. Fisher et al. (2015) conducted a study examining teaching proactive positive behaviors, academic learning time, and student achievement. Academic learning time was identified as an important indicator of student outcomes. Educators who allot more time dedicated to the curriculum and minimize classroom disruptions and reprimands have higher levels of academic achievement, student engagement, and teacher/student relationships (Fisher et al., 2015). Environments with frequent reprimands for inappropriate behavior were associated negatively with student learning outcomes. Students exhibiting signs of aggressive behavior or a lack of self-control in primary grades face many obstacles, but social-emotional support in the classroom setting from teachers may reduce the occurrence of these problems in the future for students (Merritt, Wanless, Rimm-Kaufman, & Cameron, 2012).

The research on classroom management consistently demonstrates the connection between behavior and academic achievement. The effective implementation of effective classroom management strategies enhance students' prosocial behavior (Lewis et al., 2015). Several empirical studies implied that using effective classroom management interventions increases students' behavior and academic performance (Banks, 2014; Lacoé & Steinberg, 2018). Classroom management has been linked to student behavior and achievement. Conversely, ineffective classroom management may interfere with students' on-task behavior and academic outcomes (Banks, 2014)

Proactive school-wide strategies such as the RC approach could benefit the overall climate of schools. More schools and teachers might be willing to adopt the RC approach if a uniform body of research continues to increase and support the effectiveness of the RC approach. The current study is meaningful in that it added to the existing body of research and support the local school setting. The study was supported by several studies using the RC approach and positive behavior supports in the school setting.

Summary and Conclusions

Disruptive behavior continues to be a concern in U.S. schools as outlined in Chapters 1 and 2. In Chapter 2, I conducted an extensive literature review. The literature revealed that teachers use differing techniques to respond to students' disruptive behavior. Often these techniques are punitive in nature and only respond to the immediate need of disciplining the student. Educators are spending more time on managing behavior which affects classroom instruction. Schools should establish safe learning environments where students are cared for socially, emotionally, and academically. Schools must implement evidence-based practices to comply with federal legislation. Effective preventative and proactive methods are needed for responding to student behavior.

The literature review contained various components relating to disruptive behaviors, zero-tolerance policies, punishment, and the RC approach. The conceptual framework identified in the study supporting the RC approach was the social learning theory. Bandura (1977) said that learning and behavior are a reciprocal interaction between student and teacher that connect cognitive, behavioral, and environmental

factors. Teachers and school staff have a major responsibility in supporting positive learning environments for students while managing student discipline. The RC approach can be defined as a prosocial, social emotional learning approach designed to proactively meet the social-emotional and behavior needs of students.

This study addressed a gap in school wide disruptive discipline practices and the ongoing implementation of the RC approach to proactively manage student behavior. In the literature review, I found many studies supporting a proactive approach to managing student discipline due to ongoing discipline concerns in schools. ESSA (2015) requires schools and districts to develop uniform policies following unsuccessful practices such as zero-tolerance. The RC approach creates opportunities for students to grow both academically and behaviorally. While many studies support the RC approach, Stearns (2016) defined the RC as a prepackaged social –emotional program incapable of changing the behaviors of students.

The current study added to the understanding of the perspectives of the RC approach in a small rural school setting. The review of the research strongly suggested the staff's need for a uniform behavior management system due to the discipline problems leading to the identification of the school by the California Department of Education due to the number of student suspensions. The approach chosen for the study was a qualitative case study. Qualitative case studies have the potential for in-depth examination of the experiences of individuals. In Chapter 3, I presented an overview of the study's methodology. The study's location, population, and the sample will be described. The methods of data collection and analysis will be presented.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Chapter 3 includes a discussion of the research method that was used in this study. The chapter included the research design rationale, my role as researcher, the methodology, trustworthiness, and ethical procedures. In the methodology section, I present an explanation of the study setting and sample including a discussion of sampling measures. I also present the instruments, data collection procedures, and data analysis I used.

The purpose of this case study was to identify, explore, and understand the discipline strategies being used by teachers and their perspectives regarding the RC approach that was used at the research site. The participants for this study included teachers, instructional aides, and administrators at the school site implementing the RC approach. I asked participants to engage in semistructured face-to-face interviews to gather their perspectives regarding discipline issues, discipline strategies, and the implementation of the RC approach. Specifically, I asked the participants about: (a) types of behaviors displayed by students, (b) types of consequences used in the classroom and school setting, and (c) their perspectives regarding the implementation of the RC approach. I asked open- and close-ended questions during semistructured interviews. I conducted content analysis to determine thematic categories for coding from the responses of the participants and generate insights about staff perspectives of the RC approach at the school site. I also collected documents from the site principal (classroom procedures, attendance, and discipline referrals) to gain additional information regarding management procedures and discipline problems in the school.

Research Design and Rationale

The current study used a qualitative case study design. Qualitative research designs include case study, phenomenology, ethnography, and grounded theory. Hatch (2002) stated that qualitative research relies on analysis and rich descriptions of participants' views to understand a phenomenon in an environment. The case study design was an ideal research design for exploring the perspectives of participants at the local school using the RC approach. The case study design allowed me to understand discipline practices and the implementation of the RC approach through the discovery of staff perspectives. It allowed me the opportunity to understand the experiences, perspectives, and insights of the case through the personal lens. The study answered the following research questions:

RQ1: What do key stakeholders (e.g., teachers, counselors, and administrators) believe are the strengths and areas for improvement of the RC approach?

RQ2: What types of student discipline problems exist in the school?

RQ3: What discipline strategies are teachers currently using?

RQ4: To what extent has the RC approach been implemented as planned?

RQ5: What are staff perspectives of the RC approach?

Research designs that I considered included quantitative approaches such as survey and correlational research and qualitative approaches such as grounded theory and ethnography. Quantitative studies require large samples to test numerical data by comparing or finding correlations so that the findings can be generalized to an overall population (Creswell, 2012). Qualitative research designs typically involve small sample

sizes. Quantitative studies often include quantitative data gathered from surveys and questionnaires. However, the purpose of this study required subjective and qualitative data through interviews. Thus, a quantitative research design was inappropriate for this study.

According to Creswell (2012), the grounded theory approach is a systematic way of developing a theory to explain a concept, process, or action. Grounded theory is used when the researcher is interested in data or reality founded in empirical data (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). Grounded theory is designed to allow researchers to discover patterns of behavior, with findings focusing on emerging ideas of participants (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). With ethnography, the researcher aims to examine conditions and patterns of groups with similar beliefs (Ingold, 2014). My study did not seek to generate a theory regarding the RC approach or to describe patterns of a particular group, and thus the ethnographic and grounded theory qualitative approaches were not used. The focus of this study was to identify and understand the discipline practices and staff's perspectives of the RC approach in a rural school setting. Researchers use the qualitative case study approach to answer a specific question or questions about a case. This study was designed to better understand the staff's perspectives of the RC approach. I conducted semistructured interviews with the teachers, instructional aides, and the principal. During each interview, I took detailed notes.

Role of the Researcher

I followed all the ethical guidelines outlined by Walden University's IRB, including the protection of human subjects (IRB approval #06-13-19-0111241). I ensured

confidentiality of participant information. Participation was voluntary. Participants were not coerced at any point during data collection or following the completion of the study. I did not have a supervisory role over any potential participants.

I maintained awareness of any biases through journaling. Journaling allowed me to record any feelings and observations during the interviews from participants and myself. Yin (2014) stated that researchers may express bias through selective recall or interpretation or poor questioning in which the interviewer finds what the interviewer wishes to hear. However, my role as researcher in this case study was to gather staff perspectives of the RC approach.

The staff are monitored, managed, and evaluated by the site principal. I did not have any personal relationships with staff members; however, I have a positive working relationship with all participants. I previously served as a coordinator for students at the school site that may have qualified for health, nursing, or special services. I also provided staff development in the areas of special education and MTSS to the staff. I currently work in the same county in which the school is located but for a different school district. I no longer have direct involvement with the school site.

I did not provide any incentives to participants. I talked to participants prior to interviewing to discuss the details of the study and their responsibilities. Participants were notified and provided a summary of the findings at the conclusion of the study to determine the ongoing benefit of implementing the RC approach. I carefully identified any potential biases such as those listed in the limitations and delimitations of the study. I ensured trustworthiness, integrity, and transparency during the research process. I

explicitly informed participants of their role and their responsibilities as participants in the study including their right to withdraw at any time. I examined all interview transcripts in detail to ensure accuracy.

Methodology

Participant Selection

The eligible participants for this study included 14 staff members at the school site including teachers, instructional aides, and the principal. All staff members were recruited at the research school due to the small size of the school but only seven agreed to participate. The school has one to two teachers per grade level. Creswell (2012) stated that qualitative research studies can be made up of a small number of participants who have similar experiences and perspectives associated with a certain phenomenon being investigated.

Purposive sampling was used in this study. Purposive sampling is used by researchers to explain a phenomenon or experiences and events relating to a theory using an interpretative and inductive approach (Emmel, 2013). Purposive sampling is viewed as subjective or selective, and participants are central to the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2012). With purposive sampling, the researcher is looking for participants with certain traits or qualities. Researchers recruit a sample that is diverse enough to fulfill the stated purpose of the study. All instructional staff members at the research school had experience with the RC approach and were eligible for inclusion in the study. Students and former teachers were not included in the study, because I wanted to gather the most up-to-date perspectives regarding discipline practices and the RC approach.

I conducted my study even with the small number of participants, enough to achieve saturation. According to Yin (2014), a typical case study consists of a small number of participants and can be as small as one to two participants. Morse (1994) indicated that saturation is the key to a good qualitative study but at the same time noted that there are no guidelines published or tests of adequacy for estimating a required sample size to reach saturation. Researchers must often carry out the number of interviews they prescribe in a proposal. Waiting to reach saturation is generally not an option when conducting qualitative studies (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

Instrumentation

I used several data collection instruments and sources in this study. I used an interview protocol which was audiotaped during the interview process (Guest et al., 2006). I also collected documents to review including classroom schedules, lesson plans, and discipline logs after I received IRB approval.

I used an interview guide with primarily open-ended questions (see Appendix A) to explore the experiences and perspectives of staff about the RC approach. The type of interview protocol that I used in this study was a key informant interview. Researchers suggest a key informant interview protocol for collecting data from participants with knowledge or perspectives of a specific topic (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003; Kvale, 1996). In key informant interviewing the format is structured, however the questions are open-ended. The researcher's role in key informant interviewing is to help participants express ideas of the phenomenon being studied.

The guidelines, goals, and benefits of the RC approach described by the Center

for Responsive Schools (2018c) provided the basis for the development of the interview protocols to examine staff's perspectives of the RC approach. I developed the interview protocols and presented them in Appendix A and B. The interview questions were designed to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings. To ensure reliability, I used the same interview protocol with 16 questions for each participant in the classroom setting (see Appendix A). Another interview protocol with 12 questions was used for non-classroom teachers (see Appendix B). The interview protocol for nonclassroom teachers did not include questions related directly to teaching and the classroom setting. To ensure validity, all interview questions were linked directly to the research questions.

I also conducted a pilot test of the interview questions for the classroom teachers to safeguard against bias and obtain feedback on questions (Yin, 2014). The pilot also provided me with some practice prior to interviewing (Kvale, 1996). I used two teachers who were assigned as itinerant teachers to the site, but were not study participants. Itinerant teachers are not employed by the school district but spend several hours in each class daily to support students.

Additionally, I collected classroom schedules, lesson plans, and discipline logs from the research school for document review. Document review or analysis is used in qualitative research along with other methods as a means of triangulation (Bowen, 2009). Researchers examine documents through different methods, to validate findings across data sets and thus lessen the influence of potential biases that may be present in a given study (Bowen, 2009). Triangulation, which I discussed in greater detail in another section, was achieved by means of comparisons of transcribed interview responses,

lesson plans, classroom schedules, and discipline logs. I collected three lesson plans from each teacher participating in the study during the data collection period. I also collected one schedule from each classroom teacher. Lesson plans written by teachers daily and class schedules established at the beginning of the school year specifically documented the implementation of the RC approach via evidence such as morning meetings and closing circle. Discipline logs provided by the principal indicated discipline reported by teachers including office time-outs, in-school suspensions, and out of school suspensions before and after the implementation of the RC approach. Discipline logs were identified by school year and contain all discipline infractions for that school year. For example, one discipline log was identified as 2017 to 2018 school year and one discipline log was identified as 2018 to 2019 school year. Discipline was recorded in a school database each time a discipline infraction is reported. The discipline information was stored in a school database and was retrieved from the previous school years as well as the current school year by the principal.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

The main source of data was from the participants who were teachers, an administrator, and instructional aides at the research school who are currently using the RC approach. Participants were asked to participate in the study. Participants were recruited during a staff meeting. During the staff meeting, I discussed the purpose of the study. To ensure participants did not feel coerced in any way, I waited 2 days following the staff meeting to email the consent form to e-mail addresses obtained from the school's website. In the email, I described the study including any risks and benefits that

participants might be exposed to during the study. Participants were instructed to respond to the email if they agreed to participate within 3 days of receipt. I sent another email with the same information to staff who did not respond. I received responses from four teachers, two instructional aides, and the principal.

Once the sample was selected, I conducted semi-structured interviews to learn about the participants' experiences and perspectives about the RC approach at the research school in California. Semi-structured interviews allowed for open dialogue and two-way communication during the interview process. I also provided the participants with a copy of the interview questions prior to the interview to give them an opportunity to review the questions and prepare (Yin, 2014). I started with a general and introductory questions so that the participants could share experiences and perspectives regarding the RC approach at the research school site. Additional questions were more focused, guided- and detailed. I used an interview guide to ensure that all questions were asked in the same manner. The interviews took approximately 30 to 45 minutes and were conducted at a mutually agreed upon location. The interviews allowed me an opportunity to gain understanding of the experiences and perspectives from the participants' experiences of the RC approach and discipline. I remained focused and attentive to expressions, questions and feedback from the participants that might have been pertinent to the study as the participants described their experiences and perspectives of the RC approach.

I took notes of any of the interviewees' reactions and personal impressions. Those reactions and impressions were added to my journal later in the day for each interview. Each participant was thanked for participation immediately following the interview.

Triangulation, member checks, and rich, thick descriptions are all important techniques for establishing validity (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2014) and were used in the study. Member checking gave participants the opportunity to check for accuracy and thoroughness of the statements given during interviews (Carlson, 2010). I provided each participant an opportunity to check the accuracy of the interview notes and findings for member checks. Changes and additions were made at that time to responses by the participants if needed. I discuss member checking in greater detail in the trustworthiness section.

Data Analysis Plan

Data sources included transcripts from staff interviews, notes recorded in my journal, and a review of documents. I took notes of any of the interviewees' reactions and personal impressions in my journal to help write thick rich descriptions of responses. Kvale (1996) suggested that much of the work in conducting a study using interviews must take place before the actual interview process begins. According to Kvale, the researcher must first develop the conceptual framework of the phenomenon being investigated to successfully add to the body of knowledge of that phenomenon. I conducted an extensive literature review including the conceptual framework to support the RC approach in Chapters 1 and 2.

The interview questions were developed based on the research questions supported by the conceptual framework. During the interview process, all research questions were addressed. The connection of the interview questions to the specific research question was provided in Appendix A and B. Upon completion of the

interviews, I transcribed each of the participants' audiotaped interviews verbatim. After I transcribed the interviews and the participants reviewed the responses within one week, I analyzed the data with NVivo 12. NVivo 12 is a computer-aided qualitative data analysis software. The NVivo 12 software can be used to identify trends, test theories, and cross-examine information in many ways (Woods, Paulus, Atkins, & Macklin, 2016). The qualitative content analysis technique was applied to the coded data using the NVivo 12 software.

Additionally, I used content analysis to analyze the data gathered from the interviews. Content analysis allowed for a narrative explanation and helped make sense of the perspectives and experiences of participants through identification of emerging themes (Yin, 2014). The analysis involved the identification of recurring themes and patterns from the information I gathered from the participants during each interview. The emergent themes formed the key findings of the study. I also identified possible alternatives to the findings using any discrepant data. Discrepant data is a phenomenon that occurs when data do not match the anticipated results (Yin, 2014).

When data are collected through various sources, the accuracy of the data findings are validated by means of triangulation and member checks. I triangulated the data by comparing interview transcripts to classroom schedules, lesson plans, and discipline logs. The documents are directly related to support the research questions addressed by the study (see Table 1). Discipline logs were used to address RQ2 and Lesson plans and classroom schedules were used to address RQ4. Comparing interview transcripts to discipline logs effectively demonstrated teachers' perspectives of discipline issues versus

actual reported discipline infractions. I specifically looked at the number of discipline infractions in the yearly log prior to the implementation of the RC approach (2017-2018). I also determined the fidelity in program implementation in conducting morning meetings which usually takes place in classrooms during circle time on a daily basis in accordance with the RC approach. Member checking and triangulation helped validate my findings.

Table 1

Type of Documents Analyzed

	Number collected	Person collected from	Related RQ
Discipline logs	2	Principal	RQ2 & 3
Lesson plans	12 (3 per teacher)	Teachers	RQ4
Classroom schedules	4 (1 per teacher)	Teachers	RQ4

Trustworthiness

There are several components to determining the trustworthiness of data. They are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility ensures that a true picture of the phenomenon of a study is reflected in the results (Shenton, 2004). I provided an informed consent form to all staff participating in the interviews and include steps to maintain privacy. Credibility was established as I introduced the study to the participants and gained participation at the research school. I implemented several processes to increase credibility. These strategies included maintaining a positive relationship with participants, ensuring participants were aware of their right to not participate in the study or withdraw at any time if they did not feel comfortable.

Triangulation involves using multiple methods of data collection, data sources, and analysis (Bowen, 2009). I used multiple data sources, such as interviews, discipline

logs, lesson plans, and classroom schedules to support research questions as outlined in the instrumentation and data analysis plan. I also used triangulation to ensure dependability. Member checks gave participants the opportunity to check the accuracy of my interpretations of the findings with their experiences (Carlson, 2010). I provided each interviewee an opportunity to check the accuracy of the data they provided via email. Participants were asked to review the findings and make necessary corrections to submit to me within 5 days following receipt of the summary of the findings. No changes were made by the participants.

Transferability refers to the ability to achieve similar results if the study was replicated with similar participants. As I discussed in Chapter 2, transferability to a similar or like school is difficult due to the small size of the school. However, as I discussed in the literature review positive outcomes using the RC approach were found at multiple school sites varying in size. I ensured transferability by providing rich and thick descriptions of the data (Creswell, 2012; Yin, 2014).

I also kept a journal of my notes. I took notes of any of the interviewees' reactions and personal impressions. These reactions and impressions were added to my journal later in the day for each interview. Participants were asked the same questions during semi-structured interviews to allow consistency with obtaining the accurate experiences of each participants' perspectives of the RC approach.

Ethical Procedures

I ensured that ethical procedures were followed throughout the study. I obtained approval from the Walden University IRB to conduct this study (IRB approval #06-13-

19-0111241). The IRB application outlined information regarding data collection and the data analysis section. The school district did not have a formal process for obtaining permission to conduct research, so I submitted a copy of my approved IRB application from Walden to the school district to obtain approval from the superintendent. I ensured the confidentiality of the participants, the school site, and all information obtained. Each participant received a consent form outlining confidentiality. I reminded participants of confidentiality and privacy at the beginning of each interview and their right to withdraw from the study at any time. Participants were informed of how the data would be stored at the conclusion of the interviews. I am only person with access to the data to maintain participant privacy. Data were stored in a locked cabinet in my home office. Participants are identified in the notes using randomly assigned numbers. Storage containing the name and number of participants are separate from the study notes.

Merriam (2014) stated that qualitative researchers must address ethical concerns throughout the research process. Participation was voluntary. Participants were not compensated in any way. Participants were provided a summary of the results at the conclusion of the study. Ethical considerations were expressed through the interview by (a) the statement of purpose for the study, (b) the disclosure statement regarding note taking during the interview, (c) the statement of confidentiality, (d) participants' summary of the interview presented to the interviewee after member checks were completed and (e) allowing the interviewee the opportunity to clarify or address any errors in the notes taken.

I followed guidelines outlined by the American Psychological Association (APA) regarding the retention of records for 5 years, as it pertains to research (APA, 2017). The storage device containing participants' names and other identifying information is in a locked file cabinet in my home office. I am the only person with a key to the locked filing cabinet. At the conclusion of timeframe outlined by APA (2017), I will discard all files and erase the contents of the flash drive. All collected materials are securely in a locked filing cabinet to ensure confidentiality.

Summary

Chapter 3 provided a detailed description of the methodology that I used to conduct my study. Qualitative data in this case study was collected through interviews, and document reviews on the educators' perspectives on the RC approach. This chapter outlined my role as the researcher, the participant selection criteria, instrumentation, participant recruitment, data collection and data analysis plan. I concluded the chapter with a discussion of trustworthiness, a discussion of ethical procedures, and confidentiality. In Chapter 4, I discuss the purpose of the study and research questions. Chapter 4 specifically details the setting, data collection, data analysis results, and evidence of trustworthiness.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this case study was to identify, explore, and understand the discipline strategies being used by teachers and their perspectives of the RC approach that was used at the research school. Content analysis was used to analyze the interviews. NVivo 12 was used to tabulate the codes and themes from the interviews I conducted. I used semistructured interviews to allow the seven participants the opportunity to share their perspectives of the RC approach at the research school. The research was guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: What do key stakeholders (e.g., teachers, counselors, and administrators) believe are the strengths and areas for improvement of the RC approach?

RQ2: What types of student discipline problems exist in the school?

RQ3: What discipline strategies are teachers currently using?

RQ4: To what extent has the RC approach been implemented as planned?

RQ5: What are staff perspectives of the RC approach?

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

The setting of the study was a small rural school of about 220 students (range 215-240 during the school year due to migrant student count). There are 18 staff

members which included teachers, a librarian, instructional aides, a counselor, a clerk, and the principal during the 2018-2019 school year. Students ranged in grade from transitional kindergarten designed for four-year-old students to eighth grade. The school is the only school in the school district. The participants have worked at the school for 10 or more years. Twenty percent of the students are migrant students and leave the school with their families for 5 months each school year. At the conclusion of the study, the school had 213 students (57% Hispanic, 1% African American, 15% White, and 27% other). Over the course of the study, no organizational changes occurred that may have influenced participants' experiences.

Data Collection

Interview data, lesson plans, and class schedules were collected from four participants who were teachers. Interviews were also conducted with two instructional aides and the principal. Each teacher provided three lesson plans via email after interviews were conducted. The principal also provided discipline logs. Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes. I interviewed the participants in a mutually agreed upon location at the school site. Each classroom teacher requested that interviews be held in their classrooms. The three additional participants requested to be interviewed separately in the office conference room. While participation was open to all teachers and support staff, only seven agreed to participate and corresponded directly with me via email to ensure confidentiality. I gathered all discipline documents to review from the principal. I recorded participants using an audio recorder to ensure there was no loss of their interview data while also taking notes regarding any relevant information shared

during the interview. All interviews with participants were conducted over one week. Variables of interview conditions were minimal to nonexistent. The variable was the timeframe in which staff wanted to conduct the interviews due to the number of days remaining for the 2018-2019 school year. Participants requested that I interview them at the conclusion of the school day.

Data Analysis

I audiotaped the interviews and transcribed the recordings. After all interviews were completed, the recordings were downloaded to my password-protected computer. After I transcribed each interview using Microsoft Word, I shared the transcripts with each study participant in a Word document via an email attachment. Participants were given 5 days to respond with feedback via email if they wished to make changes or corrections to their transcribed interview. All participants indicated that the transcript of their interview was an accurate reflection of their interview experience and did not make changes. In addition to the interviews, lesson plans, classroom schedules, and discipline logs were collected and analyzed for triangulation of data.

I analyzed the interviews with the seven participants using NVivo 12, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software tool. For interviews, I assigned participants numeric values to ensure confidentiality (e.g., Participant 1, Participant 2, Participant 3). Participant responses were entered into NVivo 12. Patterns of responses from the participants were noted and analyzed. I focused on the interpretations of perspectives and experiences of the participants. Using NVivo 12, I created theme nodes by carefully evaluating line by line responses from each participant. Initial nodes developed were

discipline problems, discipline strategies, challenges, implementation, overall perspectives, and successes. Responses were then categorized with common themes. Major themes emerged from each research question. NVivo 12 allowed me to see the common responses and helped me understand participants' perspectives to answer each research question for my study.

Lesson plans, classroom schedules, and discipline logs were analyzed and triangulated to determine the implementation of the RC approach as prescribed and show discipline practices. Lesson plans and classroom schedules should indicate the implementation of the RC approach. Discipline logs indicate consequences given to students that were sent to the office with an office referral. Student names and other identifying information were removed from the discipline logs by the principal. Document reviews may yield beneficial information before and after an intervention and can be used for accountability purposes (Bouffard & Little, 2004). Lesson plans and class schedules were collected from teachers. According to Gall et al. (2003), researchers should (a) identify artifacts or documents that are part of the phenomenon that is being studied, (b) determine the materials that might be relevant to the research study, (c) determine how to collect the materials for analyzing within the ethical constructs of research study, and (d) consider the validity of the collected documents. Document reviews provided useful information for the implementation of the RC approach and enabled me to better understand the implementation of the RC approach, discipline infractions, and related consequences. Member checking and triangulation helped validate my findings.

I used the documents to address three of the five research questions. Discipline logs with identifying information removed were used to address RQ2 and RQ3. I compared interview transcripts to discipline logs to explain teachers' perspectives involving discipline issues versus actual reported discipline infractions. Participants did not quantify or discuss the number of student behavior infractions. Discipline logs reported the number of specific behavior infractions and related consequences. After collecting discipline logs, I looked at the number of discipline infractions and consequences in the yearly log prior to the implementation of the RC approach (2017-2018) and during the implementation year (2018-2019). Using my journal, I recorded the number of each specific discipline infraction and related consequences. Lesson plans and classroom schedules were used to address RQ4. I also determined fidelity in terms of program implementation in conducting morning meetings by highlighting morning meetings and closing circle on each lesson plan and classroom schedule reviewed. Discipline logs were collected for the 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 school years from the principal to investigate the types of discipline problems in the school and classroom setting.

The teacher, principal, and support staff interviews yielded several thematic nodes which were gathered and used to code all interviews. A common theme in support of the RC approach from participants was overall improvement in student behavior. According to some participants, administration did not always give consequences to students sent to the office with office referrals. Some participants also noted that not all staff members were consistent in discipline practices and the implementation of the RC approach. All

participants indicated student disrespect toward teachers and/or peers as a behavior concern.

For the five research questions, seven themes emerged. There were no discrepant cases in my analysis. Data consisted of participants' experiences and perspectives of the Responsive Classroom Approach, classroom schedules, lesson plans and discipline logs. Data were only collected through interviews and document review which did not result in aberrant or discrepant cases

Results

The results of the present study are illustrated and described below for each research question to further describe staff perspectives of the RC approach. I focused on interpretations of perspectives of staff. Based on the interview responses entered in NVivo 12, I conducted a word count query and a text search query to identify themes. Research questions and developed themes are presented in Table 2. As themes emerged, some additional topics discussed by several participants were also noted. The themes are illustrated in Table 2 and discussed in the following sections.

Table 2
Major Themes

RQ #	Themes	Frequency
1	1. Improvement in student behavior	7
	2. Lack of consistency (time) to implement	5
2	3. Students show disrespect toward others	7
3	4. Educators use reactive discipline practices	7
4	5. Teachers implement components of the RC approach	7
5	6. Positive staff perspectives	7
	7. Future staff development needed	5

Note. Frequency represents how often the theme appeared across the seven interviews.

RQ1

The first RQ was: What do key stakeholders (e.g., teachers, counselors, and administrators) believe are the strengths and areas for improvement of the RC approach? For this RQ, two themes emerged (see Table 3). The two themes were improvement in student behavior related to successes as a strength and lack of consistency due to time constraints in implementation related to challenges as an area that needs improvement. All seven participants indicated an improvement in student behavior. Five participants indicated consistency in implementation as a challenge due to time constraints. Additionally, three participants discussed the MTSS foundation that the school was implementing as a factor in overall success at the research school.

Theme 1: Improvement in student behavior. The first theme established was the improvement in student behavior. All participants acknowledged an overall improvement in student behavior as a success and strength of the RC approach. Participants indicated that student behavior improved and students know the behavior expectations in the classroom and school setting. Participants also indicated that students are prepared and look forward to morning meetings. Participant 1 stated:

I see a definite improvement in overall student behavior as we establish a strong MTSS that incorporates PBIS and the Responsive Classroom. I will say that behaviors have decreased since last year. Students in my class know what to expect from the time they walk in the door. Students come prepared with materials and morning meetings set the tone for the day. Things are really going well.

Participant 2 stated, “There has been an improvement in student behavior. Students are more prepared and look forward to morning meetings daily.” Participants 3, 4, and 5 echoed similar responses. They indicated that student behavior has improved with the RC approach. Participant 6 stated, “I see a definite improvement in student behavior. Having been at this school for many years, I have seen a lot of changes and this is a positive change.” Participant 7 also indicated an improvement in student behavior.

Theme 2: Lack of consistency due to time constraints to effectively implement. The second theme for RQ1 was the lack of time to effectively implement the RC approach. Participants felt that this was an area that needed improvement in effectively implementing the RC approach. Five participants discussed lack of consistency due to time constraints as a factor in effectively implementing the RC approach. Participant 1 indicated that not enough time exists in the school day to fit all activities in. Participant 3 stated, “Morning meetings take about 15 minutes. Closing circle is also a big part of the Responsive Classroom. I don’t always have enough time for closing circle.” Participant 4 stated:

I see the value in the Responsive Classroom. Morning meetings and Closing Circle are such an important part of the school day. Morning meetings take about 15 minutes and closing circle takes time. With common core, district testing, and state testing, I find that time is an issue. There is just not enough time in the school day.

Participants 5 and 7 also discussed time as being a critical factor. They both indicated that there is not enough time in the school day for teachers to get everything done.

Three participants discussed the positive effect of the MTSS framework that the research school is continuing to build. MTSS is the overall framework in which the RC approach falls under. The school implemented the RC approach after piloting and successfully building a MTSS framework. Participants' indicated the implementation of MTSS as a strength related to supporting the RC approach. Participant 1 indicated an improvement in overall student behavior as it relates to the implementation of RC approach and MTSS. The participant indicated that behaviors have decreased since last year and students know what to expect from the time they walk in the door.

Participant 4 indicated that the research school has done a good job in developing initiatives such as the friendship club, MTSS, and the RC to support students. Participant 5 stated, "I see a lot of changes with the implementation of MTSS." Participants indicated the MTSS foundation as being a key component in implementing the RC approach.

RQ2

The second research question was: What types of student discipline problems exist in the school? In addition to the interview responses, discipline logs were collected from the principal to investigate the types of discipline problems in the school and classroom setting at the research school. Student names and other identifying information were removed from the discipline logs by the principal. Discipline logs reflected infractions and consequences students were given when sent to the office.

For RQ2, one theme emerged from the interview data. The theme was students show disrespect toward others. All seven participants discussed students' disrespect toward peers and staff as a concern. Bullying was also discussed by two participants.

Although school and classroom discipline were asked in different interview questions, the responses yielded similar results. All seven participants indicated concerns about student disrespect toward adults. Six participants indicated concerns with student disrespect toward peers and two participants discussed bullying.

Theme 3: Students show disrespect toward others. Disrespect toward adults was commonly defined by not following directions and/or talking back to staff.

Participant 1 indicated a concern with student disrespect toward teachers and staff as a concern related to discipline problems in the school and classroom setting. Participant 1 stated the following:

I would have to say the biggest discipline problem I see with students is disrespect toward teachers and staff. Some students think they can get away with it because they have in the past. When students are sent to the office, a lot of times, they are sent right back to class. They disrespect teachers and other staff all the time with no consequence. When sent to the office, they talk back to the principal too.

Participant 2 echoed a similar response with classroom and school concerns. The participant stated, "I see a lack of respect toward adults by some students. For the most part, it's the same students that make poor choices by not following directions from adults over and over again."

Participant 3 stated the following:

Although I don't have a lot of discipline problems in my classroom because I have littles [students in transitional kindergarten and kindergarten], disrespect is definitely a concern in the upper grades. Students have difficulty with following teacher directions without talking back. They may not think it's being

disrespectful, but it really is. If they would just comply without saying anything. It is really concerning and bothersome.

Participant's 4 and 6 indicated disrespect toward staff as a problem." Participant 7 stated the following:

I see a lack of respect toward adults by students. For the most part, it's the same students and it has been that way for years. I've watched some of them from second to eighth grade and their behavior has gotten worse. I love this school and all including the kids, but something needs to be done about the talking back and the disrespect. Parents volunteering in classes might help so they can see it firsthand.

Participant 5 stated, "I see students talking back, not following directions, and being disrespectful to teachers all the time." Although Participant 5 did not discuss disrespect toward peers, the response from Participant 5 supported the overall theme of disrespect toward teachers. Based on discipline logs and interviews responses, student disrespect toward staff appears to be an overall concern for the staff in effectively implementing the RC approach.

Disrespect toward peers was noted by participants as another major theme related to RQ2 by six participants. Bullying was discussed by two participants. Disrespect toward peers included, name calling, not playing with peers during recess, and being mean. Two participants identified bullying as a problem. Related to disrespect toward peers and bullying, Participant 1 stated:

Another big discipline problem I see with students is disrespect toward classmates

again because students think they can get away with it. Like I said before, when students are sent to the office, a lot of times, they are sent right back to class with no consequence. They disrespect each other all the time with no consequence. When they are sent to the office, they disrespect the principal. The constant bullying is a problem.

Participants 2 and 4 indicated that students are mean to each other. They both discussed students isolating their classmates during recess. Participant 3, who I previously reported had few discipline problems due to the young age of the students in the participant's classroom. The participant noted that disrespect was a concern in the upper grades. The participant also stated that, "A lot of parents complain about bullying." Participants 6 and 7 also stated that they felt students were disrespectful toward their peers. In addition, Participant 6 stated, "students bully other students all the time." Overall participants indicated that teasing peers was a major problem that needed to be addressed.

Discipline logs. According to the discipline logs, during the school year 2017 to 2018 prior to the implementation of the RC approach, 32 office referrals were received by the principal. During the implementation school year 2018 to 2019, 18 office referrals were received. According to the discipline logs for 2017 to 2018, student offenses included disrespect to teachers (12 offenses), teasing peers (13 offenses), and refusal to follow adult directives (7 offenses). According to the discipline logs for 2018 to 2019, student offenses included disrespect to teachers (5 offenses), teasing peers (7 offenses), and refusal to follow adult directives (6 offenses). Although participants indicated that discipline referrals were often repeated offences by the same student or students during

interviews, I was unable to determine if the same students were repeated in the logs because all identifying information was removed before the principal submitted them to me. Discipline logs reflected reactive consequences given to students that were sent to the office with an office referral. Discipline logs also reflected participants' perspectives of student discipline most frequently disrespecting staff and teasing peers.

RQ3

The third research question was: What discipline strategies are teachers currently using? In RQ3, I explored the types of discipline strategies that were being used at the research school. Discipline strategies referred to strategies in both the school setting and the classroom setting. I interviewed participants and reviewed discipline logs.

One theme emerged from the interview questions related to RQ3. The theme was educators use reactive discipline practices. All seven participants discussed reactive strategy for discipline. More specifically, participants discussed time out as a strategy used to discipline students in the classroom and school setting. Participants' also discussed time out in the classroom, time out during recess, time out in the office, and time out in other teachers' classrooms. Three participants discussed suspension.

Suspension was indicated as a reactive discipline strategy but not used regularly at the research school.

Theme 4: Educators use reactive discipline practices. The theme developed from RQ3 was educators use reactive discipline practices. All seven participants referenced reactive strategies, one being time-out, which is a form of detention and a reactive technique. Time-out in the classroom, time-out during recess, and time out in

other teachers' classes were the primary areas discussed related to timeout as a reactive strategy. Participant 1 discussed students sitting out during recess away from other students and minutes being given on the fence during recess. When staff described students sitting on the fence, they were referring to the playground being enclosed by a fence. Students given time out during recess, have recess time (minutes to play) taken away from them. When student have time taken away from them during recess, they sit near the fence away from other students. Participant 1 indicated, "Students usually sit out of recess. When students sit out during recess, it's usually for a specified period of time depending on the number of minutes they had taken away during class." Participant 2 indicated that students have morning detention or sit out of recess: "Students have morning detention or sit out on the fence during recess. It really just depends on the teacher. Teachers rarely give office referrals now. If they do, students serve office time out." Participant 3 discussed the importance of support from other teachers. The participant indicated that she relies on her colleagues a lot and that sending her students to another classroom for time-out has been an effective discipline strategy. In addition, Participant 3 indicated parent phone calls as a strategy used.

Participant 4 discussed time out during recess as an effective strategy for student discipline: "I have found that when students sit out during recess, behaviors improve because they really want to play with their friends. I also see students picking up trash around the school." Participants 5 and 6 both stated that students sit out during recess. Participant 7 discussed time out and parent phone calls as a discipline strategy.

Discipline logs. Discipline logs indicated that suspensions were at 3.8 % for the 2017 to 2018 school year. For the 2018 to 2019 school year, suspensions decreased to 1.3%. Consequences included trash pick, office time out, parent phone call, and out of school suspensions. Office time out was used most frequently in both school years in which discipline logs were collected for. For the 2017 to 2018 school year, trash pick was indicated as a consequence 8 times, office time out was indicated as a consequence 12 times, parent phone call was indicated as a consequence 4 times, and out of school suspensions was indicated as a consequence 8 times. For the 2018 to 2019 school year, trash pick was indicated as a consequence 4 times, office time out was indicated as a consequence 8 times, parent phone call was indicated as a consequence 4 times, out of school suspensions was indicated as a consequence 2 times. Office time out was used most frequently during both school years.

Although the RC approach refers to proactive behavior techniques, consequences described by the participants were based on infractions in which reactive consequences were implemented by the classroom teacher or principal. During the interviews, participants discussed trash pickup as a consequence which was evident from discipline logs. Participants did not think that office time outs occurred regularly, however office time out was the most frequently used consequence for discipline infractions during both school years according to the discipline logs. During interviews, participants indicated that very few suspensions were given as a consequence which was evident from discipline logs.

Participants also discussed office referrals as a reactive technique used to discipline students. Suspension was discussed by two participants. Participants indicated that on occasions students are sent to the office or given an office referral. Participants indicated that the consequences given by the administration are not consistent. Participant 1 said:

Office referrals vary. A lot of times students return to class with no consequence. Some have office time out. Some parents are called. When our new administrator started a lot of students were being suspended. Students are rarely suspended now due to parents being angry about the suspensions in the past. We are also utilizing the RC and PBIS. Students still disrespect teachers and other staff all the time with no consequence. When they are sent to the office, they disrespect the principal.

Participant 2 indicated that teachers rarely give office referrals now. “If they do, students serve office time out. Only repeat offenders are suspended.” Participant 3 echoed a similar response, “when students are given office referrals, they serve time out and parents are called.” Participant 4 discussed office referrals and trash pickup, “when students are given office referrals, the principal usually gives the consequence of picking up trash around the school.” Participant 6 discussed office referrals being the last resort, “When students are sent to the office, they know that there is the likelihood that they could be suspended so that eliminates a lot of referrals to the office.” Participants who indicated office referrals as a discipline strategy also indicated inconsistent consequences once the students were in the office.

RQ4

The fourth research question was: To what extent has the RC approach been implemented as planned? In RQ4, I investigated the implementation of the RC approach. More specifically, I explored staff roles in implementing the RC approach, classroom meetings, and professional development participation related to the RC approach. All participants regularly use the RC approach in their classrooms and school setting. I also determined the fidelity in program implementation in conducting morning meetings through constant comparison from lesson plans and classroom schedules. I highlighted morning meetings and closing circle on each lesson plan and classroom schedule. All lesson plans and classroom schedules included a morning meeting activity. The participants specifically described expectations during the morning greeting in the lesson plans. Each classroom schedule also included morning meeting. Fidelity of the RC approach was also evident in the interview data. Based on the research question and related interview questions the emerging theme was teachers implement components of the RC approach.

Theme 5: Teachers implement components of the RC approach. Participants discussed the implementation of the RC approach and consistent classroom expectations, i.e., rules, consequences, and daily schedules.

Participant 1 referenced the importance of consistency in implementing the RC approach and being firm with students, “I believe consistency is important in my classroom. My students know my expectations. I have to be consistent and firm with

them at all times.” Participant 2 also discussed the importance of classroom expectations by stating:

I see my main role in implementing the Responsive Classroom as a role model. When my students enter the class, I greet them and we prepare for morning meetings. Having morning meetings daily is important in establishing our daily routine and maintaining mutual trust. Students feel comfortable sharing with me and their peers. I must set the tone for the day.

Participants 3, 5, and 6 also emphasized the importance of setting expectations, being firm, and being consistent with students in implementing the RC approach. Participant 4 discussed the importance of expectations in implementing the RC,

Expectations are important. I have to be an example of how I expect students to act because they are young adults preparing to go to high school and for life. Being an example of what is expected of them is vital in their day to day behavior. If they know the expectations up front, there is no excuse. Setting expectations is an important component in implementing the RC.

All seven participants discussed the implementation of the RC approach as going well due to following expectations. Participants saw their role as setting the tone for what is expected of students.

Participants discussed classroom meeting implementation as a crucial part of the RC approach. Morning meetings and closing circle are important components of classroom meetings. Five participants specifically discussed morning meeting and four participants discussed closing circle related to classroom meetings. Participant 1

indicated the importance of morning meetings and closing circle. Participant 2 also indicated the importance of morning meetings and closing circle:

When my students enter the class, I greet them and we prepare for morning meeting. Having morning meetings daily is important in establishing our daily routine and maintaining mutual trust. Students feel comfortable sharing with me and their peers. I must establish the tone for the day. Closing circle is also important in closing our day and preparing for the next day.

Participant 4 indicated the importance of morning meetings and closing circle as, “an important part of the school day.” Participant 5 focused on the importance of both morning meetings and closing circle while Participant 6 only mentioned morning meetings related to classroom meetings.

In addition, participants discussed professional development. All seven participants discussed their participation in professional development as it relates to implementing the RC approach. Participant 1 stated, “I participated in the MTSS pilot and staff meetings discussing PBIS, MTSS, and the Responsive Classroom.” Participant 2 stated, “I participated in the MTSS pilot and staff meetings as we developed MTSS and the Responsive Classroom.” Participants 3 to 7 also discussed staff development related to the implementation of the RC approach.

RQ5

The fifth research question was: What are staff perspectives of the RC approach? In RQ5, I investigated staff perspectives of the RC approach. More specifically, in RQ5 I explored if staff perceived that the RC approach objectives were met and suggestions for

moving forward with the RC approach. Participants indicated that they felt things were going well, the responsive classroom objectives had been met as planned and they hoped to see more staff development related to the RC approach. Two major themes emerged from RQ5. The major themes were positive staff perspectives and future staff development needed. All participants agreed that the RC approach objectives were met. Five participants indicated the need for additional staff development as a suggestion for moving forward.

Theme 6: Positive staff perspectives. Participants had an overall positive perspective about the RC approach. Participant 1 said, “I think that the objectives were met. It is definitely an initiative that we will continue. We need to place it on our staff meeting agenda weekly for staff development, even if it is just sharing successes or concerns.” Participant 2 said, “It has been an improvement in student behavior.” Participants 3 to 7 also indicated a positive perspective of the RC approach. Overall, participants agreed that the RC approach objectives were being met as planned.

Theme 7: Future staff development needed. Five participants indicated additional staff development as a suggestion for moving forward. Participants 1, 2 and 3 stated that ongoing staff development was important in moving forward. Participant 3 said, “Staff development is critical for us. We meet every week and the RC needs to be on the weekly agenda.” Participant 4 stated, “Professional learning is very important in the success of the RC approach.” Participant 7 also indicated the importance of staff development as a suggestion for moving forward with the RC approach.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

Credibility was addressed to ensure that the data were properly collected during this study. The results presented an accurate account of staff perspectives of the RC approach. Each interview was done according to the prescribed data collection outlined in Chapter 3. There were no deviations in the data collection. All participants were experienced staff members who voluntarily shared their perspective of the RC approach.

Triangulation is the comparison of data from two or more sources that converge or confirm findings (Bowen, 2009). When multiple sources of data align, they help establish trustworthiness and credibility (Creswell, 2012). Yin (2014) identified the importance of using multiple sources of data to enhance reliability and evaluate the extent to which sources of data share commonalities. To triangulate data, I compared findings from participants' interviews, lesson plans, discipline logs, and classroom schedules.

Through member checking I allowed each participant the opportunity to review his or her interview transcript prior to the analysis of the data. No corrections were made during member checking. Participant confidentiality was maintained as described in the research plan. I used NVivo 12 to organize and support the data analysis process and resulting findings. The study was conducted in a school environment where I had no personal or professional relationship with staff.

Transferability

According to Maxwell (2013), the transferability of the findings of a qualitative study is dependent upon several factors, such as detailed descriptions of how the study

was conducted and the ability to be carried out in a different environment. A researcher should provide readers with enough information on the research conducted so as to establish some similarity between the study and other studies to which the research can be transferred (Patton, 2015). I outlined and detailed all aspects of this study at the beginning of every interview. I followed the interview guide in every interview.

Transferability of the study findings may be viable even given the uniqueness of the setting. For transferability of the findings to be maintained, the study must be able to be duplicated by other researchers. This study could be duplicated in different school environments with similar populations or larger school settings. It may be useful to other researchers to duplicate this study at higher grade levels or specialized populations with a subgroup similar to the research school (e.g., large migrant population). Findings from this study may provide staff with insight into building a positive, proactive school environment while promoting prosocial behaviors.

Dependability

Dependability refers to the reliability of the data collected during the study and to the credibility of the findings from analysis of the data. Dependability in qualitative research is achieved by consistent methods of data collection across participants and settings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Dependability of the study was maintained through consistent prescribed, research methods. The questions were the same for each of the seven semi-structured qualitative interviews. Two locations were used for the interviews, both locations were previously described and approved in the research plan which was detailed in Chapter 3. Consistency was maintained to protect and ensure the viability of

the data. Due to both the previously described conditions and record keeping, the confirmability of the results was maintained.

Summary

The purpose of this case study was to identify, explore, and understand the discipline strategies used by educators and their perspectives of the RC approach to teaching that is used at the research school. I used qualitative content analysis of the interviews I conducted. From the five research questions, 7 major themes emerged from the interview data. In addition, I analyzed classroom schedules, lesson plans, and discipline logs.

For RQ1 the major themes were improvement in student behavior and lack of consistency (time) to implement the RC approach. A minor theme was a strong MTSS at the research school. Staff agreed that student behavior improved but they needed more time to devote to the RC approach.

For RQ2, the major themes were disrespect toward adults and disrespect toward peers. A minor theme was bullying. Participants indicated student disrespect toward staff, disrespect toward other students and bullying as an ongoing concern. Discipline logs indicated a decrease in discipline infractions and office referrals during the implementation year.

For RQ3, the major themes were detention and office referrals. A minor theme was suspension. Participants indicated that students are given detention as a consequence and office referrals, but students are rarely suspended. Discipline logs reflected

consequences given to students that were sent to the office with an office referral.

Consequences included parent phone calls, office time out, trash pickup, and suspensions.

For RQ4, three major themes emerged. The major themes were consistent classroom expectations, classroom meetings implementation, and professional development participation. Participants indicated that students knew classroom expectations, classroom meetings were being conducted and their participation in staff development. Lesson plans and classroom schedules also revealed the implementation of the RC approach in each participant's class.

For RQ5, the major themes were positive perspective and future professional development. The overall perspective of the RC approach from all participants was that they felt that the implementation was successful and additional professional development was needed.

In Chapter 4, I discussed the results from my study. I collected data through semi-structured interviews with seven study participants, which included four teachers, two instructional aides, and the principal. Classroom schedules, lesson plans, and discipline logs were also analyzed and triangulated. In Chapter 5, I will include the interpretation and analysis of the findings in the context of the conceptual framework, discussion, conclusion, and recommendations.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this case study was to identify, explore, and understand the discipline strategies being used by teachers and staff at the research school and their perspectives regarding the RC approach. The goal of the study was to provide the local school with evidence to inform school practices and policies on proactive strategies using the RC model to minimize student discipline issues and contribute to the existing research on schoolwide behavior management. Qualitative data in this case study were collected through interviews and document reviews regarding educators' perspectives on the RC approach. The study addressed five research questions. Interviews yielded seven themes. Participants felt that the implementation was successful and additional professional development was needed.

Interpretation of the Findings

Interpretation of Findings Related to Conceptual Framework

The positive perspectives and conceptual framework present a cohesive direction for the ongoing implementation of the RC approach in the research school setting. The conceptual framework used to support this study and the findings was Bandura's social learning theory. According to Bandura (1977), individuals learn and acquire behaviors by observing the behaviors and attitudes of individuals in their environment. Meeting the social-emotional needs of students is imperative in creating a positive classroom environment. The RC approach was designed to meet the behavioral, social, and emotional needs of students as defined by Bandura's social learning theory. The RC approach states that students succeed in the classroom when their behavioral, social,

academic, and emotional needs are met. The RC approach principles emphasize the importance of relationships and nurturing classrooms as in Bandura's social learning theory.

As a result of interview data, seven themes emerged relating to the RC approach. Several of the themes developed are supported by Bandura's social learning theory. Theme 1 was improvement in student behavior and theme 2 was lack of consistency and time to implement. Bandura (1997) stated that behaviors are acquired from surroundings through the process of observation, and individuals can learn behaviors while they witness them. Participants indicated that student behaviors improved but more time was needed to implement the RC approach. If more time is allotted to implement the RC approach, improvement in student behavior may further improve and be evident for staff.

Bandura indicated that individuals need to understand the social-emotional needs of students and the importance of providing modeling (Bandura, 1997). Based on interview data, lesson plans, and classroom schedules, staff at the research school implemented components of the RC approach such as only morning meetings to better understand and meet the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of their students. All participants indicated a positive perspective regarding the RC approach and improvement in student behavior. Staff indicated their need for additional staff development and more time to implement the program.

Based on interview data, teachers and staff view social and emotional learning as an integral part of student learning at the research school. In Bandura's social learning theory, he identified the need for understanding the social-emotional needs of students

which was important to this study in understanding and exploring the RC approach at the research school. Bandura's social learning theory helped me to better understand the findings of this study because it relates to how individuals, behaviors, and the environment interact in affecting a student's social and emotional growth and progress. If behavior support foundations are in place and the social and emotional needs of students are being met, staff might feel more inclined to allot additional time and initiatives to implement all components of the RC approach.

Interpretation of Findings Related to Prior Research

Based upon the research and literature review, I assumed that student behavior would improve, and proactive behavior management strategies would be used during and following the implementation of the RC approach at the research school. Participants indicated an improvement in student behavior and a reduction of reactive strategies in managing student behavior as a result of implementing the RC approach. Discipline logs also indicated a decrease in student discipline infractions. Themes resulting from the interviews support the overall findings and interpretations related to prior research.

Theme 1 was improvement in student behavior. All staff indicated an improvement in student behavior with the implementation of the RC approach. As noted in the literature review, there is evidence that educators need focus on proactive behavior management techniques may lead to a decrease in student discipline problems and an increase in student achievement, improvement in teacher effectiveness, and safer learning environments for all (Chan, 2016; Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2014; Sheras & Bradshaw, 2016). During the implementation of the RC approach at the research school, the number

of discipline infractions and overall consequences decreased, while some behaviors continued to be exhibited by students, requiring educators to use reactive techniques to address the behavior. Discipline logs collected from the principal (not yet available for public view by the California Department of Education) also indicated a decrease in office referrals during the 2018-2019 school year. According to participant responses related to theme 1 and theme 5, students appeared to have learned positive social skills through their participation in classroom meetings.

For Theme 2, participants indicated that they needed more time to effectively implement the RC approach. Theme 2 also related to theme 5 in which participants indicated that components of the RC approach such as only morning meetings or only closing circle were being implemented during daily instruction in the classroom. Abry et al. (2015) found that teachers implementing the RC approach with fidelity had better student-teacher interactions. If teachers at the research school can allot more time to effectively implement the RC approach, they may see additional benefits beyond those found in this study and be willing to implement all components consistently including morning meetings and closing circle.

The research participants indicated that students show disrespect toward others. Disrespect toward teachers was a component of theme 3. Improving student-teacher relationships could possibly lead to a decrease in disrespect toward teachers. Fisher et al. (2015) found that teacher-student relationships, academic achievement, and student engagement were greatly enhanced with the implementation of proactive strategies and allotment of more time for curriculum and minimizing classroom disruptions and

reprimands. Student disrespect and other negative behaviors often lead to teachers using reactive discipline practices. To improve upon prior school practices, teachers and staff at the research site agreed to exchange inconsistent reactive and punitive responses with proactive measures that emphasized evidence-based strategies to promote prosocial skills. Nash et al. (2016) found that students benefit from concise rules and consequences regarding behavior expectations; however, reactive approaches are short term, only managing behaviors in the moment. Participants in this study indicated that reactive measures were still being used but necessary at times. Participants also indicated that behavior infractions and reactive consequences often involved repeat offenders. Discipline logs indicated a decrease in office referrals but not an elimination. Although students benefit from proactive strategies and well-defined behavior expectations, reactive approaches often emerge to manage behaviors in the moment (Nash et al., 2016).

Merritt et al. (2012) found that emotionally supportive teacher-student interactions were associated with lower levels of teacher-reported student aggression. Merritt indicated that moderate emotional teacher support (83%), and high levels of teacher emotional support (17%) in classrooms resulted in decreased student discipline. While Merritt noted that discipline infractions decreased as a result of implementing the RC approach and schoolwide positive behavior support interventions, teachers did not report an elimination of behaviors. Fisher et al. (2015) also found an improvement in student behavior and student-teacher relationships with the implementation of the RC approach. According to participants and supported by discipline logs, student behavior improved as a result of the implementation of the RC approach in the research school.

The results may be the outcome of student participation in the RC approach. One of the concerning behaviors reported by participants and evident on discipline logs was disrespect toward peers and staff. Although this behavior was still exhibited, it decreased during the implementation year 2018 to 2019.

Overall, staff perceived the RC approach as being successful in reducing discipline infractions in Theme 5 but indicated a need for additional staff development in Theme 7. The findings of this study are supported by the existing literature regarding the reduction in discipline infractions with the implementation in the RC approach. Participant responses and office referrals both support an improvement in student behavior.

Limitations of the Study

There were some limitations in this study. The school was a small school in a rural farming area. There are approximately 240 students and one to two teachers per grade level. There are approximately 40 migrant students of the 240 students at the research school. Determining the consistency of the RC approach program and the usefulness of its principles and practices may be difficult in continuity because some of the students leave for several months during the school year due to migrant status.

Another limitation may be generalizability. The study was conducted at a single district consisting of a single Transitional K to 8 site implementing the RC approach. Very few school sites with similar populations exist. The behavior at the research school site may not always mirror the behavior at similar sites which may restrict the generalizability of results (Simon & Goes, 2013). In a qualitative study, replication of

findings may also be difficult to achieve. As evident in the results, teachers' discipline practices and implementation of the RC approach with fidelity varied from class to class and grade level to grade level. The lack of direct control over the fidelity of implementation of the RC approach may also affect the results.

Recommendations

As a result of the information emergent from the present study, some recommendations may have the potential to enhance and further improve and support student behavior and the implementation of the RC approach at the research school site. One recommendation for future research includes measuring the effects of the RC approach on academic performance in the classroom setting at the school site or with a similar population. Several researchers found growth in student achievement while implementing the RC approach or proactive schoolwide behavior intervention programs (Fisher et al., 2015; Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2014).

A study should be done where the researcher assesses the effectiveness of an ongoing evaluation strategy for classroom meetings as well. The effects of the ongoing evaluation strategy should provide important information about methods to continually improve the classroom-meeting process. If data from the study show that improved student behavior resulted in improved academic performance, teachers may be more willing to allot more time for implementation and engage in all components of classroom meetings including both morning meeting and closing circle.

Another recommendation is the assessment of the effectiveness of classroom meetings over a long period of time. Longitudinal studies of the RC were limited to a few

years (Rimm-Kaufman & Sawyer, 2004; Zimmermann et al., 2013). I was unable to find studies that followed students through the years. The research school is a transitional kindergarten through eighth grade site. Conducting a longitudinal study over a period of seven to eight years could be beneficial.

Implications

Despite the limitations of this study, the results have some important implications for the research school and schools struggling with schoolwide student discipline problems. This study showed that participants' perspectives indicate that classroom meetings could be effective in improving student behavior. Research-based models for the RC approach could serve as the basis for planning the implementation of such a program. The design or model may have to be modified to meet the needs of the school as in the case of the research school. Included in the plan for the program should be a process for evaluating the effectiveness of the RC approach on an ongoing basis to continually improve the program.

Another important implication related to improvements in the study school may be the effects on academic performance. In this study, I did not attempt to address this possible relationship, but improved behavior among students, positive classroom community, and fewer office discipline referrals should provide more time for students to acquire academic skills. Improved relationships among students could result in more opportunities for students to support each other in acquiring social and academic skills.

This study can lead to positive social change by helping educators from the research school and similar school sites in identifying the behavioral supports needed for

students to be and feel successful in the academic setting. The results suggested ongoing professional development is needed to enhance and improve the implementation of the RC approach at the research school. The findings from this study validate the reason for staff at the research school and similar school environments to improve social systems for a better school environment and classroom climate to improve behavior outcomes for students. The social learning theory states that individuals learn and acquire their behavior by observing others. The study provided evidence that points to the importance of educators using proactive behavior intervention strategies so that students learn and develop positively in their learning environments. Similar school sites may use the findings of this study to compare their behavior issues to better understand and address behavioral problems with proactive solution that could decrease behavior infractions.

Conclusion

The RC approach establishes a foundation of building fundamental social and emotional skills while helping school staff implement proactive behavior techniques for students in the school and classroom setting. Based on the results of this study, it is apparent that teachers and staff may be aware of the effectiveness of both proactive and reactive classroom management strategies. Although teachers and staff are aware, some teachers and staff have reported using reactive classroom management techniques, asserting that they are necessary in curtailing behaviors that disrupt the learning environment. Reactive classroom management techniques are perceived as effective by some because it happens in the moment for behaviors that cannot be prevented, it is important to further offer professional development and teacher education that affords

teachers and staff with behavior management education such as the RC approach that is proactive in creating successful learning environments.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol for Classroom Teachers

Time of Interview:

Start Time:

Stop Time:

Date:

Place/Location: Interviewer:

Participant: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14

Grade Level: _____

Research Questions

RQ1: What do key stakeholders (e.g., teachers, counselors, and administrators) believe are the strengths and areas for improvement of the RC approach?

RQ2: What types of student discipline problems exist in the school?

RQ3: What discipline strategies are teachers currently using?

RQ4: To what extent has the RC approach been implemented as planned?

RQ5: What are staff perspectives of the RC approach?

Introduction

1. How many years of teaching experience do you have?
2. How long have you been at this school?
3. How do you discipline students currently in your classroom or instructional setting? (RQ3)
4. How are students disciplined in the school setting for behavior infractions resulting in office referrals? (RQ3)
5. Generally speaking, what do you see as your main role in implementing the RC approach? (RQ4)
6. How often did you have classroom meetings to support the RC approach and for how long? (RQ4)
7. Consider the objectives of the RC approach. To what extent do you think the RC

- approach was able to meet the expected objectives? (RQ5)
8. Describe the professional development (PD) activities related to the RC approach that you have attended? (RQ4)
 9. What would you identify as your biggest challenges in student discipline in your classroom? (RQ2)
 10. What discipline problems exist in your classroom? (RQ2)
 11. What discipline problems exist in your school? (RQ2)
 12. What would you identify as your biggest challenges in implementing the RC approach? (RQ1)
 13. What would you identify as your biggest disappointments in implementing the RC approach? (RQ1)
 14. What would you identify as your biggest successes in implementing the RC approach? (RQ1)
 15. What suggestions could you offer that would make the RC approach more effective in your educational setting (e.g., classroom, school)? (RQ5)
 16. What additional comments or information would you like to add?

Conclusion:

Thank you for your participation in this interview. Let me summarize the main points from our discussion and then I will give you an opportunity to respond to the feedback.

Summary:

Response from Interviewee:

Thank you again for your participation

Appendix B: Interview Protocol for NonClassroom Teachers

Time of Interview:

Start Time:

Stop Time:

Date:

Place/Location: Interviewer:

Participant: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14

Grade Level: _____

Research Questions

RQ1: What do key stakeholders (e.g., teachers, counselors, and administrators) believe are the strengths and areas for improvement of the RC approach?

RQ2: What types of student discipline problems exist in the school?

RQ3: What discipline strategies are teachers currently using?

RQ4: To what extent has the RC approach been implemented as planned?

RQ5: What are staff perspectives of the RC approach?

Introduction

1. How many years of experience do you have in education?
2. How long have you been at this school?
3. How are students disciplined in the school setting for behavior infractions resulting in office referrals? (RQ3)
4. Generally speaking, what do you see as your main role in implementing the RC approach? (RQ4)
5. Consider the objectives of the RC approach. To what extent do you think the RC approach was able to meet the expected objectives? (RQ5)
6. Describe the professional development (PD) activities related to the RC approach that you have attended? (RQ4)
7. What discipline problems exist in your school? (RQ2)

8. What would you identify as your biggest challenges in implementing the RC approach? (RQ1)
9. What would you identify as your biggest disappointments in implementing the RC approach? (RQ1)
10. What would you identify as your biggest successes in implementing the RC approach? (RQ1)
11. What suggestions could you offer that would make the RC approach more effective in your educational setting (e.g., classroom, school)? (RQ5)
12. What additional comments or information would you like to add?

Conclusion:

Thank you for your participation in this interview. Let me summarize the main points from our discussion and then I will give you an opportunity to respond to the feedback.

Summary:

Response from Interviewee:

Thank you again for your participation