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Behavior Management

Abstract

Behavior management strategies are extremely influential in a successful classroom setting. Curriculum is obviously a major concern of education reform, but can students really learn the curriculum in a classroom that is not well managed? Having a classroom that is well managed allows for students to take the risks they need to in order to access new knowledge and grow as citizens of our communities. Carefully designed survey questions were distributed to multiple educators in a school of poverty to gauge the feelings of those working in the classroom on the successes and hardships of behavior management programs. Data collection occurred anonymously. Completed surveys were then analyzed for common themes of successful strategies found among educators of students living in poverty.

Keywords: behavior management, poverty, Positive Behavior Management Strategies, PBIS

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Abstract

Behavior management strategies are extremely influential in a successful classroom setting. Curriculum is obviously a major concern of education reform, but can students really learn the curriculum in a classroom that is not well managed? Having a classroom that is well managed allows for students to take the risks they need to in order to access new knowledge and grow as citizens of our communities. Carefully designed survey questions were distributed to multiple educators in a school of poverty to gauge the feelings of those working in the classroom on the successes and hardships of behavior management programs. Data collection occurred anonymously. Completed surveys were then analyzed for common themes of successful strategies found among educators of students living in poverty.

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Title

In education, the major focus on learning is usually curriculum. However, after experiencing a shift in behaviors of students due to redistricting of a district, I became aware of how important behavior management strategies are in a successful classroom. If students are not well managed by their teachers and do not feel that they are in a safe environment to learn, the curriculum becomes almost irrelevant because behavioral issues overcome educational ones. An easy fix is to remove the student who is exhibiting problematic behaviors from the classroom, in order to allow the other students to continue their learning. However, this does not allow that child to learn. Classroom management is essential in ensuring that all students have access to their education. It is abundantly clear that students of different races and in low poverty schools have the most difficulties with acclimating to the typical school setting. Investigating the multitude of ways that educators use to manage a classroom can help unlock some key aspects in making sure the students who are less likely to be successful in a school setting reach that success.

In the research study, I surveyed a multitude of teachers about their classroom/behavioral management styles. I asked teachers to discuss the differences that they saw in schools where there was a higher population of low income families and those in which families were living above the poverty line. I also asked for their stories of success and of failure. My goal was to see if there were common elements noted by teachers that found success so that this information could be used to help create success in the future. I also looked for patterns of failure to see where things need to be improved upon or what strategies we can eliminate. As I analyzed these anonymous surveys, I spoke with colleagues about the responses to see if they were surprised or

understanding of the results. I compared the years of experience, the number of different teaching placements, as well as the prominent grade level taught.

I found the educators I surveyed used, and were for the most part, familiar with Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS). The results expressed that relationships with both the families and the students were a high priority for successful behavior management in the classroom. Student's home life was another priority that the educators I surveyed had.

A successful classroom consists of an effective management system that supports students' behaviorally. For some students, they do a great job of rising to school expectations and self-monitoring their behavior. For others, behavior management skills need to be monitored and taught. Crothers and Kolbert (2008) state that "teachers find accommodating behavioral difficulties more challenging and less feasible than making instructional modifications of academic problems" (p. 132). Although teachers have been successful with differentiating academic assignments to meet the needs of each student, behavior management programs are often set as a 'one size fits all' model in the classroom.

Students of different races and in low-income areas seem to suffer the most from the lack of differentiation in classroom management. In fact, it has been proven that there is a disproportional amount of students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds in special education (Utley & Ubiakor, 2015). Daily, Frey, and Walker (2015) support disproportionality, stating that they found a more significant impact of intervention programs on students in high-poverty schools. Skiba, Ormiston, Martinez, and Cummings (2016) also support the notion that exclusionary discipline places students "especially students of color, at risk for a range of negative consequences" (p. 121). Webster-Stratton, Reid, and Stoolmiller (2008) point out that up to twenty-five percent of students living in poverty experience negative social and emotional

outcomes. One perspective, supported by Bierman, Coie, Doge, Greenberg, Lochman, McMohan, and Pinderhughes (2013) and Cartledge, Singh, and Gibson (2008) is that intensive and early intervention is key in helping to close the achievement gap for these students.

Early Intervention

Bierman et al. (2013) point out that aggressive-disruptive behaviors in early elementary students are a predictor of their academic success in adulthood, need for special education, and likelihood of dropping out of school. Similarly, McClory, Snow, and Tamis-LeMonda (2005) found that children with non-compliant behavior “are at a heightened risk of developing deficits in their academic skills that can lead to peer and parental rejection and low self-esteem” (p. 568). Therefore, due to the high risk of not dealing with aggressive-disruptive behavior, it is essential to act quickly using an intensive early intervention. Skiba et al. (2016) agree that educators must act preventively in order to help children be successful in schools. Crothers et al. (2008) support this notion and emphasize the importance of early intervention in preventing and reducing behavior concerns in children.

In order to better serve children who are at a behavior and, often academic disadvantage, early intervention seems to be the first step. The next stage is determining which interventions or strategies work best for students and make the strongest impact. While Cartledge et al. (2010) and Dailey et al. (2015) believe that explicit instruction is key, others, such as Bierman et al. (2013), Crothers et al. (2008), Partin, Robertson, Maggin, Oliver, and Wehby (2010), and Olivares-Cuhat (2015) find that positive environments and teacher relationships make all the difference. There are also some findings from McClowry et al. (2005) and Utley et al. (2015) that suggest a combination of the two.

Positive Environments and Teacher Relationships

Often times, students who displayed aggressive-disruptive behaviors showed lower levels of school readiness, a trait often associated with low-income students (Bierman et al., 2013). Typically, the behaviors that are expected and deemed appropriate in a school setting are often not conducive to the learning styles of low-income or African American students. It has been shown by Olivares-Cuhat (2015) that students attending high poverty schools prefer kinesthetic and sensing-perceiving styles of learning. Olivares-Cuhat (2015) also noted that students had a lower preference for visual and intuitive thinking as well as interpersonal and stress management skills. These learning style preferences often come across as impulsive or hyperactive behaviors in typical classrooms (Bierman et al., 2013). Cartledge et al. (2008) agrees that “problem behaviors are aggravated by inadequate schooling and poor classroom management” (p. 30) while Skiba et al. (2016) adds that students of color are “at risk for a range of negative consequences including academic disengagement, decrements in school achievement, school dropout, and juvenile justice involvement” (p. 121).

Looking at classroom management through the lens of Response to Intervention (RtI) can help educators to cater to the individual needs of each student while still developing a whole classroom management system (Cartledge et al., 2008). To elaborate, the first tier in the RtI process is about providing support and structure for all students to create a positive classroom. The second tier provides more targeted strategies to students who have been identified as at risk for behavior problems. The third tier provides intensive strategies to reduce further conflict and reintegrate students into positive routines (Skiba et al., 2016). Nye, Gardner, Hansford, Edwards,

Hayes, and Ford (2016) support the RtI model by stressing the importance in identifying the type of student behavior and the function behind it to better determine a method that fits this particular student. Nye et al. (2016) believes there are three types of problematic behaviors: noncompliance, avoidance, and aggression. Each would call for a different intervention and can better assist the student in being successful in the classroom. Partin et al. (2010) suggest that it is the teacher's role to establish an environment where appropriate academic and social behaviors are supported and encouraged. This includes consistent recognition of students making good choices and following up with a reinforcement.

In the study of the Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) program Bierman et al. (2013) and Daily et al. (2015) both found that this program begins with trainers helping to support and guide classroom teachers as they develop and implement positive behavior management programs. Teacher preparation is an aspect that is essential in the success of any behavioral program and is supported by Reddy and Dudek (2013) and Pinkelman, McIntosh, Rasplca, Berg, and Strickland-Cohen (2015) in regards to other programs. This work helps to establish an environment where students feel safe and welcome. Crothers et al. (2008) suggests creating a climate that is inhospitable to bullying by establishing rules that prohibit it, and teaching students how to handle bullying behavior. Crothers et al. (2008), Partin et al. (2010), and Utley et al. (2015) all suggest a whole class incentive or token system to reinforce positive behaviors.

To further the tier one support in the RtI behavior model, Olivares-Cuhat (2015) and Crothers et al. (2008) both suggest that engaging and effective instruction are imperative in helping students stay on task and focused on their academia rather than off-task or disruptive behaviors. Olivares-Cuhat (2015) states that “instructional methods need to be harmonized with

learning styles” (p. 2). McClowry et al. (2005) support this method by stating that behavior problems could be avoided if “the environment provides goodness of fit” (p. 569). Furthermore, Skiba et al. (2016) discusses the “strong relationship between academic failure and misbehavior” (p. 122) while mentioning the importance of monitoring the cohesiveness of the curriculum with students’ skill level. This illustrates the fact that if a student is learning and working in an environment that is conducive to their learning, they will be more successful, thus, supporting the idea that an environment and curriculum that is conducive to a student’s learning style is beneficial to the child. McClowry et al. (2005) goes on to state that strategies can be taught to students to help them respond to learning styles that are not innately their strengths. Hence, although a certain learning style is not the child’s first choice, he can still be taught coping mechanisms to find a way to learn through that teaching style. This can be done by “replacing negative patterns of interactions with more responsive and skilled child management strategies” (McClowry et al., 2005, p. 569). To establish a classroom with diverse learning styles, a teacher can create learning centers that include multiple learning styles or develop lessons where students can be “debating with classmates, imagining an end to a story, self-monitoring one’s progress, conducting a hands-on science project, analyzing a literary passage, and dramatizing a situation” (Olivares-Cuhat, 2015, p. 9). Additional strategies an educator may use include, but are not limited to; pre-teaching, advanced organizers, and smooth transitions (Skiba et al., 2016).

Crothers et al. (2008) establishes the importance of facilitating cooperative learning activities to improve relationships among children especially in diverse populations. This could be done through peer tutoring or classroom projects to help foster friendships, identification, and a sense of protectiveness. It is important that an educator finds a balance between competitive activities and cooperative goals to encourage both individual and group achievement (Crothers et

al., 2008). Bierman et al. (2013) agrees that “peer-pairing” sessions of supervised play allow first grade students the opportunity to practice social skills with classmates. Additionally, Skiba et al. (2016) states that “instruction that incorporates social-emotional learning for students are effective in reducing problem behaviors, increasing prosocial behaviors, and increasing academic achievement” (p. 123). Thus, supporting the notion, that implanting the use of social skills is imperative to students’ success in the classroom.

Praise and Positive Relationships

Once a classroom climate with appropriate activities pertaining to student learning styles has been developed, Partin et al. (2010) and others believe that teacher praise and opportunities for students to respond (OTR) correctly is the next stage of helping to promote appropriate student behavior. Opportunities for students to respond correctly helps to promote successful students and allows them to gain positive experiences within school. This is especially true of struggling students. Students need to be given the opportunity to correctly respond to questions, tasks, and demands. This can be done by providing modifications and supports to set a student up to be successful. Partin et al. (2010) found that this positively impacts students’ appropriate academic and social behaviors. They also found that increasing the pace of OTR increases academic responses and task engagement while decreasing off-task and disruptive behaviors.

Positive teacher’s praise is essential to maintaining class structure. It has been discovered that the use of praise reinforced following directions, student engagement, on-task behavior, correct academic response, and work completion (Partin et al., 2010). McClowry et al. (2005) point out that student and teacher relationships critically influence how students adjust. This is particularly true for disadvantaged children. One program that supports students who have

difficulties with building relationships and participating in appropriate school behavior is Cool Tool. This program was run based on a teacher's praise versus reprimand ratio. It was implemented in classrooms where teachers were identified as having a ratio that was below the school's average; therefore, illustrating the importance of teacher praise versus reprimand ratio (Utley et al., 2015).

It is important that praise is combined with a decrease in the attention given to problem behaviors. Partin et al. (2010) shows that this leads to a decrease in talk outs, arguing with teacher requests, and other disruptive behavior. When giving praise, educators must link their statements directly to a behavior or skills. For example, if an educator is looking to increase student participation by students' raising their hands, they may reinforce this behavior by acknowledging a student demonstrating the skill. More specifically, a teacher can hand a student a token while also providing verbal phrase, such as, "I love the way Johnny has raised his hand so quietly to participate in our discussion, thank you Johnny!" This brings attention to the demonstration of the skill that the teacher wishes to see in class without placing any negativity on a student who may be talking out of turn.

Praise and a token reward system are important, but they are proven even more effective when they are combined with brief and precise requests (Cartledge et al., 2008). These requests can be reminders to students in the second or third tiers of RtI. In this case, students may not respond to subtle hints of what is expected with praise and require direct instruction. Instead of asking questions like "Are we ready to begin?" a student may require a direct prompt, such as, "Johnny sit in your seat." In this case, if a student does not comply it may require a consequence for the student (Cartledge et al., 2008).

By using praise as a reward as well as a way to provide clear boundaries and reinforce expectations, educators are “sustaining a positive, nurturing, caring environment” (Nye et al., 2016, p. 52). Skiba et al. (2016) further supports the importance of positive relationships between teacher and student stating that “classrooms with quality teacher-student relationships have fewer classroom behavior problems and better academic performance” (p. 123). This illustrates what Cartledge et al. (2008), Partin et al. (2010), and McClowry et al. (2005) research supported. Students who are praised and rewarded for good choices have a better rapport with their teachers and therefore, are able to be more successful in the classroom. Furthermore, Ashley (2016) states that “teaching always centers on relationships” (p. 16) and goes on to discuss the importance of really understanding why a student behaves the way that they do by getting to know them.

Skiba et al. (2016) and Banks & Obiakor (2015) stress the importance of culturally responsiveness in dealing with student behaviors. Both authors talk about the importance of being culturally self-aware. This means, “bringing consciousness to the values, beliefs, and biases” (Skiba et al., 2016, p 124) of one’s culture because an educator will “better understand other people’s cultures once they understand their own” (Banks & Obiakor, 2015, p. 85). Once the gaps in understanding have been identified, it will be easier to enhance your cultural knowledge and better relate to your students by being able to validate other cultures and increase cultural relevance in your classroom (Banks & Obiakor, 2015). Skiba et al. (2016) mirrors these thoughts through their discussion of occurring a curriculum that is culturally relevant to your students and being able to explicitly teach procedures and social “norms” that may be culturally new to students. Using culturally relevant teaching and praise help educators to form the

important relationships with their students that has been proven to be an essential component of student success.

Explicit Instruction

The idea of explicitly stating to students what is necessary to be successful in the classroom is exemplified through social skill programs. Cartledge et al. (2008) write that “social-skill instruction is a proactive, positive intervention that is especially important for [culturally and linguistically] diverse learners” (p. 33). Students who have not been exposed to ‘typical’ classroom culture have little background knowledge to base their behaviors on; therefore, they require greater support in order to learn specific social skills. An educator cannot assume that a child knows what expectations the teacher has for the students in appropriate ways of coping with social situations in the classroom. It is important to tell the student what the expected behavior is, model that behavior, and give students the opportunity to practice the behavior while providing corrective or reinforcing feedback. Simply punishing students for incorrect behavior will not give them the opportunity to learn the correct behavior (Cartledge et al., 2008).

Daily et al. (2015) studied multiple social-skills programs to analyze which aspects are most successful. Walk Away, Ignore, Talk, Seek Help (WITS) is a whole school and community program that is implemented throughout the school year for kindergarten to third grade students that integrates WITS lessons with existing learning objectives. WITS found that over a long period of time the numbers of victims of bullying were reduced significantly, especially in high-poverty schools.

A second program is Making Choices: Social Problem Skills for Children (MC). This is a 22-week schoolwide program that is targeted at alleviating social information processing deficits,

reducing peer rejection, and increasing prosocial behaviors in aggressive secondary elementary students. This program increased prosocial behaviors and emotional regulation skills while decreasing relational aggression (RA) (Daily et al., 2015).

A third program, PATHS, was studied by Bierman et al. (2013) and Daily et al. (2015), and is a curriculum for grades one to five that trains students in social awareness, social interaction, controlling inappropriate behavior, and problem solving skills. Bierman et al. (2013) and Dailey et al. (2015) found that first-graders who participated in the PATHS program showed significantly less aggression and hyperactive-disruptive behavior.

Yet another program developed for elementary schools is the INSIGHTS program. INSIGHTS is a comprehensive, temperament-based intervention that uses a facilitator and a puppet therapist to deliver the curriculum to students. INSIGHTS also works closely with parents and teachers. The data showed that “preventative interventions can promote positive change in high-risk subgroups” (McClowry et al., 2005, p. 577). A final intervention strategy, the Fast Track Prevention Program, was analyzed by Bierman et al. (2013). This program combines many elements including explicit instruction, cooperative grouping, teacher praise, and individual tutoring. The Fast Track Prevention Program implemented a universal social-emotional learning program as well as consultation and support for classroom teachers. The children who were targeted in this study attended extracurricular group meetings as well as “peer-pairing” programs to assist them with peer relations. The Fast Track Program showed a positive impact on both the academic and social-cognitive skills of the students involved (Bierman et al., 2013). Although the programs all had different success rates and protocol, they all found success in explicit instruction of social skills to students. Some results were impacted based on the group studied or the elements that went along with the instruction.

Positive Behavioral Supports and Interventions (PBIS)

Positive Behavioral Supports and Interventions (PBIS) is a program described by Ashley (2015) as a tiered framework of positive behavior systems in a school in which the success of the program depends on having clear expectations that are “taught, rehearsed, and reinforced consistently” (p. 15). PBIS is similarly described by Burke, Rispoli, Clemens, Lee, Sanchez, and Hatton (2015) as a prevention-oriented program that is “focused on preventing challenging behaviors and increasing children’s social, emotional, and behavioral competence” (p. 5). This program is comprised of preventative strategies and supports to allow children to be successful because it has been found, especially in high poverty districts, that punitive discipline exacerbates the discipline issues in the classroom (Ashley, 2015).

Burke et al. (2015); Banks and Obiakor (2015); and Garbacz, McIntosh, Eagle, Dowd-Eagle, Hirano, and Ruppert (2016) all agree that PBIS follows a specific framework. This framework includes establishing and explicitly teaching clear expectations for student behavior along with procedures to teach the desired behaviors. PBIS also includes strategies and incentives for students to follow the behavior expectations as well as a way to collect data to drive the decision making process. The PBIS program aims to improve school safety and climate by proactively improving school behavior issues as a whole school focus (Banks & Obikar, 2015). Pinkelman et al. (2015) discusses the importance of staff and administrative support in the PBIS program. They point out that without a committed staff implementation can be inconsistent and therefore ineffective. This sentiment is supported by Banks and Obiakor (2015) in stating that PBIS must be a school-wide intervention plan with clear expectations that are reinforced beyond one classroom.

Burke et al. (2015) discuss the importance of positivity in the PBIS program. It is essential that the expectations are positively stated to be a reference point instead of a list of demands. In childhood settings, positive expectations may be defined according to the routines of the classroom while in adolescent settings they are defined according to separate class periods (Burke et al. 2015). Students who are exhibiting the desired behaviors are then rewarded positively (e.g., positive attention) as opposed to undesirable behaviors being punitively dealt with (Garbacz et al. 2016). Burke et al. (2015) discuss this idea of rewarding the positive as “catching” children demonstrating positive behaviors (p. 6).

The expectations and desired behaviors of a school’s PBIS program must be not only clear, but also explicitly taught to students (Banks and Obikar, 2015). The goal of PBIS is to not only reduce inappropriate behaviors but also to teach positive behaviors that can be used later in life (Burke et al. 2015). Banks and Obikar (2015) illustrate the importance of this explicit instruction by pointing out that “if children and youth are not taught how to meet behavior expectations in classroom environments, then behavioral delinquency is likely to persist” (p. 85). In other words, if you do not show a child the proper way to behave they will revert to what they know. It is imperative to remember that students who are culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) do not always receive the socialization skills that are expected to be successful in this society and it is the educator’s job to explicitly teach that to them (Hall et al. 2007). Banks and Obiakor (2015) further discuss the importance of CLD students. They point out that because there is an overrepresentation in CLD students it is essential to make PBIS culturally responsive as well (Banks & Obiakor, 2015; Garbacz et al., 2015). This means that educators need to address and attack their bias in order to create school-wide supports that promote a positive, culturally responsive climate (Banks & Obiakor, 2015). Garbacz et al., (2015) agree, stating that

PBIS programs need to provide a framework that will integrate practices that are sensitive and responsive to each culture and community represented.

Schools that have implemented PBIS programs have found that the programs are associated with improvements in student behavior (Garbacz et al. 2015). PBIS programs increase the occurrence of appropriate actions while reducing the occurrence of inappropriate actions (Hall et al. 2007). PBIS has been proven to improve the pro-social behaviors of both ethnic minority and majority students (Garbacz et al. 2016). Garbacz et al. (2016) also points out that schools that implemented PBIS programs had a decrease in overall office discipline referrals for students of all racial or ethnic backgrounds.

Family Involvement

Hall et al. (2007) and Garbacz et al. (2016) also discuss the importance of involving families in the implementation of the PBIS program. Family involvement, in an attempt to further improve student behavioral challenges, is a notion that is supported by Olivares-Cuhat (2015), Crothers and Kolbert (2008), McClowry et al. (2005), and Bierman et al. (2013).

Garbacz et al. (2016) points out that family involvement in PBIS programs is usually underemphasized despite that it is necessary for PBIS to be effective. They continue to discuss the fact that fostering these collaborative relationships between families and educators is essential to student success. Hall et al. (2007) discusses the fact that often a child's challenging behaviors are often correlated to a family or parenting behavior (e.g., harsh physical discipline or lack of involvement). Olivares-Cuhat (2015) supports Hall et al. (2007) when she states that it is less likely for low income students to attend preschool or have parental involvement in reading activities.

Hall et al. (2007) and Grabacz et al. (2016) discuss multiple ways to involve families in, specifically, a PBIS program. Hall et al. (2007) suggests that parents be given a PBIS training so that they can continue to implement the practices being taught at school in the home. Hall et al. (2007) states that only six of the families participated in the study, but all families stated that with the implementation of PBIS in the home their child exhibited less of the challenging behaviors that they had seen. The families that participated noted that the quality of life in their home had improved (Hall et al., 2007). Grabacz et al. (2016) support the idea of extending PBIS procedures from the school to the home. Grabacz et al. (2016) suggest that the expectations be laid out at school based on the communication of family representatives on the school's PBIS leadership team. This system also involves some parent training in PBIS values and procedures (Garbacz et al., 2016).

McClowry et al. (2005) also emphasizes the importance of involving parents in the INSIGHTS program. INSIGHTS is a “comprehensive, temperament-based intervention for inner city primary school-age children and their parents and teachers” (p. 569). The program itself is defined by the fact that parents are involved in helping their child to be successful. This program also showed that the number of problem behaviors the child was exhibiting at home and school declined (McClowry et al., 2005).

Although the parental involvement plans suggested by Hall et al. (2007) and Garbacz et al. (2016) are specific to PBIS, parental involvement is still something that is highly regarded as an essential component of behavioral management. Bierman et al. (2013) discuss the importance of parent training groups in general. They state that parent management and skill training groups can help improve parent-child relationships and in turn promote prosocial skills for the child (p. 119). Crothers and Kolbert (2008) provide suggestions for how to approach the parent of a

student who is exhibiting bullying behaviors so that they are understanding and a part of your team. They discuss that it is important to recognize that a parent may not have an issue with these behaviors or may become defensive of their child. However, Crothers and Kolbert (2008) offer some suggestions for how to combat those feelings and insure that the parent does not undermine the teacher's authority. These strategies include providing concrete facts that do not invite blame and avoid long discussions. Crothers and Kolbert (2008) are illustrating that in order to help this child, the support of their parents is essential.

Overall, it is clear that a combination of early intervention, positive teacher relationships, conducive classroom environments, parental involvement, and explicit instruction are essential in developing a well-rounded behavior management program (Bierman et al., 2013; Cartledge et al., 2008; Crothers et al., 2008; Dailey et al., 2015; Olivares-Cuhat, 2011; Partin et al., 2010; McClowry et al., 2005; Utley et al., 2015).

Researcher's Stance

My role in the study was as surveyor. I presented fellow educators with questions to find information about their management styles and their own experiences. Through these surveys, I compared and analyzed the findings to note trends in successes and failures of behavior management styles. I also used this information to compare to my research findings. This allowed me to make connections to the larger picture beyond educators in my area.

I am currently certified in Elementary Education, grades 1-6. I am currently pursuing my Master's of Science in Special Education. While I am working towards this second certification, I am also employed full time as a fourth grade general education teacher at the school where I am conducting my study. The school contains grades pre-k through fifth and has both special education and general education classes.

Methodology

Context

This study is taking place in an elementary building in upstate New York. The school has approximately 160 students in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. After thinking about locations and staff to interview, I chose this location for two reasons. First, most of the staff has transitioned from a school of choice to a low-income school. By looking at a staff that has experienced two different groups of students it opens up the possibilities of what they have seen and tried in terms of behavior management strategies. This staff will be able to discuss and address the differences which will be an asset to this study. Secondly, it is the building that I am employed as a full time teacher so I have access to emails and contact information for staff.

Participants

I sent an email link to a survey to the staff members at the school. Respondents range in their job titles and have different roles within the building. There are four special education teachers and twenty-one general education classroom teachers. In addition to the teaching staff there are teaching assistants, special area teachers, a mental health team, and administration. I closed the survey after twenty random responses.

Method

This study was designed to determine if there are commonalities among behavioral management strategies when used with specific groups of students. Specifically, I am looking to see if educators have found or seen success with certain strategies based on the average income of the families enrolled. This study is designed to discover which strategies we can promote or eliminate when working with students from low-income families.

Data was found based on voluntary survey responses from teachers using a web-based survey program. Staff members in the building were asked questions to determine their use and knowledge of certain behavior management strategies based on research. Survey questions also included responses based on building systems and their successes or failures in the classroom. Web-based survey links were sent to the entire staff via email.

To ensure informed consent and protecting the rights of participants I sent an email explaining the methods and intentions of the study. Furthermore, I asked respondents to agree to participate before completing the survey and received the results anonymously.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data was collected via the web-based survey program. I used charts and graphs to explore the similarities and differences of the responses. I analyzed my results based on teacher's responses to having heard of a program vs. their implementation of it. I will specifically be looking at the findings within PBIS since that is the school based program and one that was prevalent in my research.

Results and Discussion

The results have been broken into closed ended questions and open ended response questions. I will be sharing results as well as discussing their meaning starting with the quantitative data and closing with the qualitative responses. The qualitative data has been coded using priori codes.

Survey question one asked participants to share how long they have been teaching for and then, how long they have been teaching in their current building (low-income school). The

answers ranged from two to thirty years with the average being sixteen years of teaching. This demonstrates that there is a wide range of experience from the participants in the survey. For the second part of the question the answers ranged from one to twenty-four years at the current building with ten years being the average. This shows that generally, teachers seem to be staying in this school. It also illustrates that the respondents of the survey have experience in not only years teaching, but also with other environments to make the comparisons necessary in the upcoming questions.

Survey question two asked participants to rank, from no knowledge to extremely knowledgeable, how knowledgeable they are with Positive Behavior Supports and Intervention (PBIS). Two of the twenty respondents (ten percent) stated they were slightly knowledgeable, fifteen (seventy-five percent) felt moderately or very knowledgeable and three participants (fifteen percent) felt extremely knowledgeable. This leads me to the conclusion that most of the staff feels comfortable with PBIS. The two that stated they were only slightly knowledgeable were surprising to me because the school offers so much professional development on the topic. This leads me to believe this may be some of our new teachers (either to the career or the building) who have not had the amount of professional development, or experience, as some other teachers. A conclusion I can make based on responses is that the professional development that has been offered has benefited the staff.

Survey question three ask participants to state if they think PBIS is successful as a behavior management tool in their classroom using a scale system of strongly disagree to strongly agree. Of the twenty respondents, there was one (five percent) who disagreed and one who was neutral. There were eight (forty percent) to both somewhat agree and agree and two (ten percent) who strongly agreed that PBIS was successful in their classroom. This data shows

that ninety percent of those surveyed agreed that PBIS was successful to some extent, illustrating staff buy in and support which will initiate consistency for students across the building.

Survey question four asks teachers to rank how often they implement PBIS in their classroom. This question was meant to see if the percentage of people who agreed PBIS was successful was equated to the percentage of people who regularly use PBIS in their classrooms. This data shows that nineteen out of twenty participants (ninety-five percent) use PBIS strategies in their classroom fifty percent of the time or more with ten participants saying they use PBIS most of the time. Only one participant said that they only sometimes use the strategies. In further research, I would explore the reasons why some teachers feel they are or are not implementing PBIS. The data alludes to the fact that teachers who find PBIS successful are more likely to use it regularly in their classroom.

Survey question five proved to be the most interesting to me (Appendix 2). This question asked teachers to rank the order they thought the following factors influenced a student's behavior in the classroom:

1. Family Income
2. Family Involvement
3. Self-Esteem
4. Teacher-Student Relationship
5. Educational Ability
6. Other

The "other" choice was included to give participants the opportunity to write in another factor they saw was important and still illustrate where on the continuum they believe it fell. Only twenty percent of participants utilized the "other" option. Ninety percent of participants listed family income four or five out of five illustrating that they believe it is not directly a factor in students' behavior. Family involvement was listed by eighty-five percent of participants

(seventeen out of twenty) as a top three choice. Six people placed it first, six people placed it second, and five people placed it third. The other three people placed family involvement last. This indicates that it is something this population of educators find very influential in a child's success. All but one participant listed teacher-student relationship as a top three choice as well. This was chosen by ten of the participants as the most influential factor while six participants listed it second and three put teacher-student relationship third. Only one person put teacher-student relationship fourth. This indicates these participants value the relationship with their students and realize the significance in building a relationship with students. Some further research in this area might include addressing how PBIS supports these relationships and how teachers can make time for this vital part of their job in a busy schedule. One participant listed self-esteem as the most influential aspect of behavior while five listed it second, eleven placed it third and three placed it fourth. Again, no one thought this was the least important factor showing that student's opinions of themselves do impact the behavior that they exhibit in the classroom. The final option that was given was educational ability. None of the participants listed this as most influential of behavior while one listed it as second, one placed it third, nine placed it at fourth and nine more at fifth. Educational ability was not seen as a factor in why students may be acting up. Overall, family income and educational ability were seen as the least influential factors while teacher-student relationships and family involvement were seen as the most influential factors.

Survey question nine asked participants if they believed that more intensive strategies are needed to use with students from low-income families. They answered by choosing strongly disagree, disagree, somewhat disagree, neither, somewhat agree, agree, or strongly agree. The participants said that they strongly agree, four said agree, seven said somewhat agree, four

neither agreed nor disagreed, one somewhat disagreed, and one disagreed. Without elaboration it is hard to assume why participants answered the way they did. My assumption would be that because of other factors that seemed to be more influential, low-income would not be the indicator most of the participants would use to decide how intensive behavior management strategies need to be for a child.

Survey question six asked participants to explain their answers for question five (which factor influences behavior). I broke the answers up into the following priori codes:

- a. Home life
- b. Teacher relationship
- c. Self-esteem
- d. Poverty
- e. Other

There were fifteen comments pertaining to a child's home life. Eight comments pertaining to teacher relationship, six about self-esteem, three about poverty and three that did not fit into any of the previous categories. Upon reading participant responses the reasoning for the order in which they chose the factors that influence a child become much clearer. Participant one felt as though a child's home life did not equate to income or family involvement in the school. They defined this as if the child is well-rested or fed. Participant two echoed this notion discussing the importance of "sleep nutrition [and] routines at home." Participant fourteen stated that "behaviors are first learned within a household" reiterating their choice of parents as a top influencing factor. Participant seven agreed discussing the importance of having positive role models at home. Participant two gave some telling statistics from her group of students saying that "20% have a guardian in prison, 80% are on DOJO, and 15% are being raised by a grandparent because their parent is under twenty-four" years old. Some participants discussed home life as parent involvement. Participant ten said that they notice a difference if a parent is

on DOJO, calls back, or helps with homework. They defined this as parent involvement explaining their choice to rank that option as influential. Participant ten explained why poverty was not a top influential factor in their opinion stating that all but one of her students live in the government assisted housing next door and that most live in poverty, but not all have the same behavior patterns. Participant two discussed in depth how influential self-esteem can be on her students. They stated that when there are more than five students in the class that are struggling with viewing themselves as “bad” their instruction becomes about managing behaviors and they are not able to get to the depth of learning they do in years when there are less than five students struggling with self-esteem. Participant eight summarized the responses regarding teacher relationships well in stating that “kids need to like and feel liked and cared for by their teacher. They need to feel they can be successful and smart.” Participant fourteen also discussed how their relationship with their students results in a positive experience because they value their time together and want to stay in the classroom to learn. Participant four listed underlying disorders as another factor to take into account. Participant twelve explained the importance of sensory integration and allowing students to meet their sensory needs.

Question seven asked for additional behavior management strategies that participants had found successful. Again, I broke the comments into pre-determined codes of

- a. Choice
- b. Token Economy
- c. Positive reinforcement
- d. Restorative Practice
- e. Other

I found that positive reinforcement and token economy were the most popular responses and at times, overlapped. Participant three stated that complimenting students on both behavior and work ethic was a successful positive reinforcement. Participant six echoed that by stating that

they recognize student progress, effort, and product as well as give positive verbal messages. Positive reinforcements or rewards were listed by participant one, seven, and eight. Multiple participants discussed the benefits of a token economy. Participant eleven stated that they use a sticker chart for students to earn a prize or a privilege. Participant twelve emphasized the importance of a tangible object for some students. A prize lottery jar for good behaviors was also contributed by participant fourteen. Participants five and six spoke of restorative practices such as peace circles, peer mediation, team building, and classroom community. A few other comments included participant fifteen, seven and one discussing that they build relationships/make connections with students and their families. In analyzing their responses, I noticed that all of the strategies they listed were positive in some way. There were no punitive/disciplinary strategies that were used/found to be successful. This aligns with the idea of PBIS highlighting the positive behavior of students.

Question eight asked participants to discuss any strategies they have found to be unsuccessful. These comments revolved around mostly punitive strategies. Participant one and fifteen listed taking away recess as an ineffective strategy that leads to anger and frustration. Participant two and seven echoed each other in putting students down or publicly making them move their name when they've made a poor choice is both unkind and un-motivating for students. Participant fourteen noted that restorative questioning has not helped them in the past be successful with students.

Conclusion

Positive behavior interventions and strategies are highlighted as the most effective for students, specifically, students of low-income backgrounds, however, this could be applied to

students in general. As my research and data illustrates, there are a lot of aspects in determining a student's needs and helping them to be successful. There are certain research based strategies that have shown effectiveness for a wide variety of students. Positive Behavior Support and Intervention (PBIS) is very popular currently and encompasses most of the influential aspects of helping a child behaviorally succeed in a school environment. It is evident that forming relationships with students and their families is essential in helping a child be successful. PBIS also states that students need explicit instruction in appropriate behaviors, something that, surprisingly, did not come out in the research I conducted. In the future, this would be an aspect to be addressed. Students all have varying needs in the areas of academia as well as social and behavioral skills. Without taking a look at what each child needs and specifically addressing these needs, students will continue to struggle.

Appendix

Appendix 1: Survey Questions

Please answer the following:

1) How many years have you been teaching for? _____

How many years have you been at Jefferson Elementary? _____

2) How knowledgeable are you with Positive Behavioral Supports and Intervention (PBIS)?
(circle one)

Extremely knowledgeable

Slightly knowledgeable

Very knowledgeable

Not knowledgeable at all

Moderately knowledgeable

3) PBIS is a successful behavior management strategy in my classroom. (Circle one)

Strongly agree

Agree

Somewhat agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

4) How often do you feel you implement/see positive interventions in your classroom? (circle one)

Always

Most of the time

About half the time

Sometimes

Never

5) Please rank (1-5) the order of factors which you think influence a student's behavior in the classroom.

- ___ Family Income
- ___ Family Involvement
- ___ Self Esteem
- ___ Teacher-Student Relationship
- ___ Educational Ability
- ___ Other (explain below)

6) Please explain your answer to the previous question if necessary.

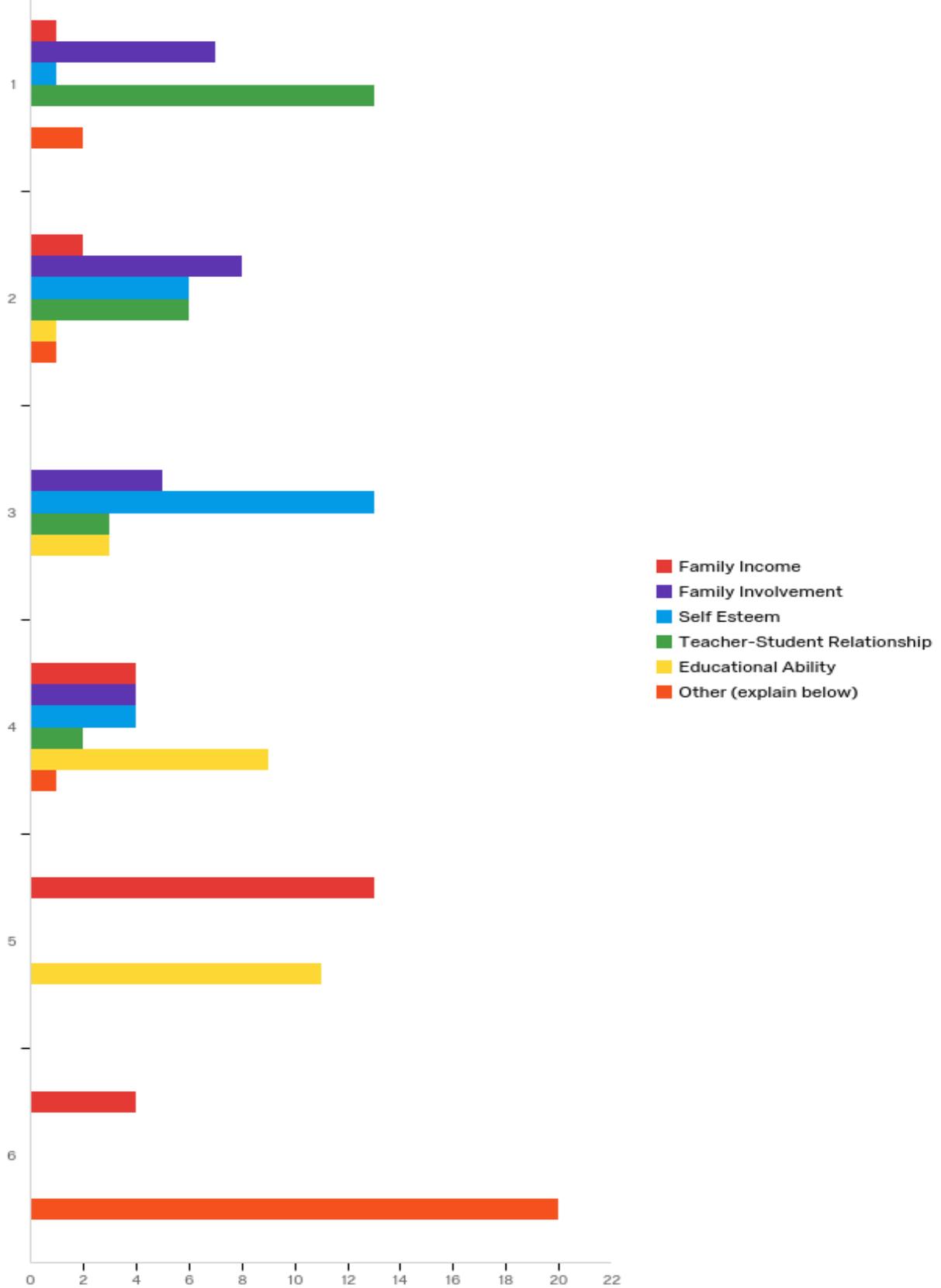
7) Are there any additional behavior management strategies you find successful? Please explain.

8) Are there any behavior management strategies you have found unsuccessful? Please explain.

9) More intensive strategies are necessary to use with students from low-income families. (circle one)

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Appendix 2: Survey Response Question 5



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