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Examining the Development and Implementation of Functional Behavior Assessments and Behavior Intervention Plans through the Experiences of School Personnel

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Examining the Development and Implementation of Functional Behavior Assessments and Behavior Intervention Plans through the Experiences of School Personnel

Abstract

For school personnel, dedicating energy to addressing problem behaviors within the school setting becomes important when behaviors threaten the safety or disrupt the learning of the student and/or others (Anderson, Rodriquez, & Campbell, 2015). Not addressing problem behaviors may lead to a pattern of discipline referrals, which is likely to result in increased time out of the classroom (Anderson et al., 2015). Removal from the classroom further interrupts students' ability to learn as they are missing valuable instruction while out of the classroom setting (Stephan, Connors, Arora, & Brey, 2013). At times school personnel are faced with working with students who exhibit problem behaviors. One approach recommended to help students manage behaviors in school is a functional behavior assessment (FBA) and the subsequent development of a behavior intervention plan (BIP). Using the lens of the Planning Realistic Implementation and Maintenance by Educators (PRIME) model (Sanetti et al., 2014), the purpose of the study was to gain an understanding of strategies used in the development and implementation of FBAs and BIPs from key stakeholders involved in the behavior management process in a school environment. The study highlights the training experiences of key school personnel in the behavior management process, giving support to the need for ongoing training opportunities for developing and implementing FBAs and BIPs. Results revealed that it is important to make sure everyone supporting the student is involved in the process. Results also highlight the important role school leaders hold in increasing the efficacy of student behavior plans.

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Examining the Development and Implementation of Functional Behavior Assessments
and Behavior Intervention Plans through the Experiences of School Personnel

By

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Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Ed.D. in Executive Leadership

Supervised by

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August 2017

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my core...my family. To my husband, Will Sr., words cannot express the amount of gratitude I have for you and the love and support you shower over me daily. You have been my rock through every step of this journey and have helped support me getting through this process, thank you. To my son, Will Jr., you are amazing! I love and appreciate you and look forward to experiencing life through your eyes!

To my parents, Cassandra and Derek, you have always believed in me and helped encourage me to see my greatness. Thank you for always pushing me to dream big and chase hard after those dreams. To my sisters: Delise, Dasia, and Serenity and my nieces: Amari, Naviyah and Wynter, I love you all! I want you to understand the value of an education and I hope that my journey will help encourage you to pursue anything that you desire.

To my extended family: The Johnsons; The Crittendens; The Whitfields; The Murrays; and The Delehantys, and to the various other friends and family members looking out for me, thank you for always being in my corner. Each one of you represent a piece of the foundation of love and support which I relied heavily on to carry me through this process. To my in-laws, Linda and Charles Murray, thank you for all the support and encouragement. To my fellow members of The Perfect 10 Cohort, you will all forever be like family. Thank you for helping me grow and supporting me along this journey. To my

fellow (TCW²) team members, thank you for being my anchors in this process! I cannot put into words how much I appreciate your love, guidance and support.

To the faculty and staff of the DEXL program as well as my dissertation chair, Dr. Cianca and committee member, Dr. Johnson, thank you for your guidance and support along this journey. To the advisors of our cohort, Dr. Dingus-Eason and Dr. Cleverley-Thompson, thank you for always being there when I needed you; your gentle nudges and unconditional support was invaluable.

Lastly, I'd like to honor my loved ones who have passed on but continue to remain a source of strength and support for me: Willie Joe Crittenden, Clara Bell Crittenden, Glenda Crittenden, and Judge & Jewel Pugh.

Biographical Sketch

Chastity Murray is currently a Nationally Certified School Psychologist and Licensed Mental Health Counselor. Mrs. Murray attended St. John Fisher College from 2002 to 2008, graduating with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology with a Minor in Religious Studies in 2006 and then earning a Master of Science degree in Mental Health Counseling in 2008. She then went on to Roberts Wesleyan College from 2010 to 2013 where she graduated with a Master of Science in School Psychology and a Certificate of Advanced Studies in School Psychology in 2013. In the summer of 2015 Mrs. Murray entered the Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership at St. John Fisher College. Mrs. Murray pursued her research on examining the development and implementation of Functional Behavior Assessments and Behavior Intervention Plans through the experiences of school personnel under the direction of Dr. Marie Cianca and Dr. Deborah B. Johnson and received the Ed.D. degree in 2017.

Abstract

For school personnel, dedicating energy to addressing problem behaviors within the school setting becomes important when behaviors threaten the safety or disrupt the learning of the student and/or others (Anderson, Rodriguez, & Campbell, 2015). Not addressing problem behaviors may lead to a pattern of discipline referrals, which is likely to result in increased time out of the classroom (Anderson et al., 2015). Removal from the classroom further interrupts students' ability to learn as they are missing valuable instruction while out of the classroom setting (Stephan, Connors, Arora, & Brey, 2013).

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Overview of Student Behavior in School Settings

Managing disruptive behavior is an important aspect in the role of school-based personnel. Abebe and Hailemariam (2007) shared that school-based personnel are faced with students who demonstrate challenging behavior that can impact their overall engagement in the academic setting. Challenging or disruptive student behavior often interferes with the delivery of instruction when teachers have to stop teaching in order to address the problem behaviors (Abebe and Hailemariam, 2007). Research suggests that problem behavior can be reduced by building individuals' skills in resilience (Rhee, Furlong, Turner, & Harai 2001).

One approach recommended to help students manage behaviors in school is a functional behavior assessment (FBA). A "functional behavior assessment is a process of assessing the purpose or 'function' of a student's behavior in relation to its context or environment, so that appropriate interventions can be designed to meet the unique needs of individual students" (Iwata et al., 2000, p. 182). FBAs can be viewed as a problem-solving approach to address undesired behaviors. Hanley, Iwata, & McCord (2003) explored the importance of understanding the determinants of behaviors as a basis for identifying effective treatments for problem behavior giving support for the underlying premise of FBAs.

Today's youth present with behaviors that may have many different origins and represent a range of functions specific to the individual (Terjesen, Jacofsky, Froh, &

DiGiuseppe, 2004). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997 is special education legislation requiring schools to use a function based approach when assessing problem behavior in students with a disability (New York State Education Department, 2013b). The completion of a functional behavior assessment (FBA) and the development of a behavior intervention plan (BIP) have been identified as the recommended practices for addressing problem student behavior based on special education regulations (NYSED, 2013b).

Dedicating energy to addressing problem behaviors within the school setting becomes important when behaviors threaten the safety or disrupt the learning of the student and/or others (Anderson, Rodriguez, & Campbell, 2015). Not addressing problem behaviors may lead to a pattern of discipline referrals, which is likely to result in increased time out of the classroom (Anderson et al., 2015). Removal from the classroom further interrupts students ability to learn as they are missing valuable instruction while out of the classroom setting (Stephan, Connors, Arora, & Brey, 2013). Janosz, Archambault, Morizot, and Pagani, (2008) and Archambault, Janosz, Morizot, and Pagani, (2009) correlated the amount of time spent engaging in instruction to academic achievement levels and concluded that the more time a student is in class and exposed to educational material, the higher the level of academic achievement. As described by Janosz et al. (2008) and Archambault et al. (2009), students ultimately suffer academically when they are sent out of the classroom.

When problem behaviors are not addressed in school settings, academic achievement can be indirectly impacted (Janosz et al., 2008). One of the major indicators of academic achievement is graduation from high school. Graduation rates are routinely

measured at school and district levels. In New York State, overall graduation rates for all students have improved slightly from 77% to 79% from 2013 to 2015 (New York State Education Department, 2015). Over the same time period the graduation rates for students classified as low income, rose from 68% to 71% (NYSED, 2015) and rates for students classified with an educational disability increased from 49% to 54% yet remain well below the general education population (NYSED, 2015).

Henry, Knight, and Thornberry (2012) suggested that lack of a high school diploma or a completion credential is often associated with lower salaries, limited job availability, lower self-esteem, increased dependence on welfare, and increased likelihood of judicial involvement. The potential negative outcomes of leaving high school without a diploma or credential gives reason to find methods that address problem student behavior and decrease the amount of time students spend out of class. This emphasis on improving student behavior may then lead to more positive academic achievement outcomes (Janosz et al., 2008; Archambault et al., 2009).

School psychologists are often responsible for conducting functional behavior assessments as a part of their role in student behavior management within schools. Classroom teachers, in turn, are primarily responsible for the implementation of behavior plans because they work most directly with the student on a regular basis. School administrators or program supervisors also have a role within the behavior management process as they are typically responsible for supporting the staff in addressing problem student behavior (Katsiyannis, Conroy, & Zhang, 2008). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997 was considered a turning point in education where

exploring the “function” of behavior became a focal point in the realm of behavior management (Couvillon, Bullock, & Gable, 2009; Oliver, Pratt, & Normand, 2015).

As concluded by Hanley et al., (2003) it is important to have a clear understanding of what might be contributing to the problem behavior to develop strategies to target the underlying cause of the behavior. These strategies can then be summarized into a behavior intervention plan (BIP), which includes targeted interventions aimed at reducing the effects of environmental factors on undesired behaviors and ideally teaching the student a more appropriate replacement behavior (Crimmins & Farrell, 2006). Although IDEA outlined required timeframes for conducting an FBA, information regarding specific procedures for conducting an FBA were loosely defined, leaving school districts to develop their own approaches for completing FBAs (Couvillon et al., 2009). With each district creating its own strategies for development, FBAs varied across organizations.

The development of functional behavior assessments does not always accurately describe the function of a child’s behavior, which may impact the successfulness of the plan at addressing the target behavior (Cosden, Panteleakos, Gutierrez, & Barazani, 2004; Blood & Neel, 2007). In an attempt to understand common practices when completing an FBA, Roscoe, Phillips, Kelly, Farber, and Dube, (2015) asked practitioners about general practices in developing functional behavior assessments as well as information about training and competence with conducting FBAs. Roscoe et al. (2015) found there was a variety in practices and training levels among study participants as well as an overall need for additional training as a consistent theme.

After conducting a functional behavior assessment, the information obtained during that process is used to develop a behavior intervention plan (BIP). According to Crimmins and Farrell, BIPs include intervention strategies that are designed to teach alternatives to problem behaviors and help students learn more appropriate behavior responses (2006). Ingram, Lewis-Palmer, and Sugai, (2005) identified several components to a comprehensive BIP including: an aspect aimed towards eliminating triggers, teaching the student skills to promote independence considering the factors that are maintaining the behavior, and making environmental changes that encourage the student to engage in appropriate behavior.

Abebe and Hailemariam, (2007) highlighted the fact that school-based personnel are being presented with students who display some challenging behaviors that may impact their functioning within the school setting. Managing these behaviors becomes an additional component in the role of an educator as they aim to support students within the school environment. Reed, Osborne, and Corness identified the guiding purpose of behavior management is to attempt to predict and control behavior (2007). As defined in the therapeutic crisis intervention work completed at Cornell University, behavior can be defined as a cyclical process, a visual representation is outlined in Figure 1.1. Functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention plans aim to interrupt the behavior cycle and teach the individual strategies for appropriately managing their behavior (Hanley et al., 2003).

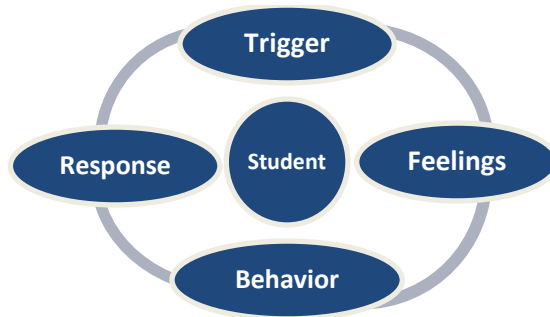


Figure 1.1 The Behavior Cycle (Therapeutic Crisis Intervention). Figure 1.1 outlines the behavior cycle as defined within therapeutic crisis intervention model developed at Cornell University.

Problem Statement

Managing student behaviors is a complicated process that can be both time consuming and disruptive to the learning environment. A teacher may have to stop teaching to address a student who is engaging in an undesired behavior, which causes a disruption in instruction and ultimately impacts the learning environment. A student who is displaying the problem behavior may end up being sent out of the classroom and, by his/her own actions, may be robbed of valuable classroom instruction. A functional behavior assessment (FBA) is an evidenced-based practice for addressing problem behavior and is required based on educational legislation (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 1997). FBAs are meant to be a beneficial tool; however, the FBA process presents a different set of problems.

The problem regarding functional behavior assessments is twofold. First, there are inconsistent procedures for developing FBAs and BIPs resulting in poorly developed plans. Second, there is inconsistent support for the implementation of the plan resulting in ineffective behavior management. The lack of consistency in procedures for developing FBAs is likely exacerbated by the lack of clearly defined procedures within the provisions of IDEA. The legislative mandate for schools to begin following the process

of completing FBAs is a given. However, without clear guidance on how to conduct these plans, schools have independently developed methods for completing FBAs (Couvillon et al., 2009).

As researchers have explored methods and practices for completing FBAs and BIPs, a constant theme arises around the difficulty of developing plans that effectively promote behavior change (Roscoe et al., 2015) or developing BIPs for students with significant problem behaviors (Blood and Neel, 2007). Findings by Archmanbault, Janosz, Morizot, and Pagani, (2009) suggested that developing successful plans requires a clear understanding of the reason or cause for the undesired behavior. When the reasons for the behavior are clearly understood, specific strategies can be developed to target them and attempt to generate a change in behavior. When FBAs are not developed well, or the true function of the behavior has not been identified, the result is likely that the strategies will be ineffective and the student will continue to engage in the undesired behavior (Archmanbault et al., 2009). Continued behavioral concerns will likely lead to the student being sent out of class, which ultimately means missing instruction and decreased academic achievement (Stephan, Connors, Arora, & Brey, 2013). As previously mentioned, the amount of time a student spends engaged in instruction can be correlated to academic achievement, essentially meaning the more time a student is in class and exposed to educational material, the higher the level of academic achievement (Janosz et al., 2008; Archambault et al., 2009).

Like ineffective FBAs, poorly developed behavior intervention plans are also likely to be ineffective at promoting behavior change resulting in continued disruptions to the class, continued disciplinary consequences for the student and likely continue to

interfere with the educational process (Stephan et al., 2013). With the noted concerns around the development and implementation of behavior plans, it may be helpful to take a more in-depth examination of the FBA process. When plans are developed and implemented well they lead to a reduction in problem behavior; when done poorly, a reduction in problem behavior is not likely to occur (Stephan et al., 2013). Although there is limited information in the literature regarding specific procedures for developing and implementing BIPs, a key factor in the adequate development and implementation of FBAs and BIPs may be on training methods for preparing individuals to develop these types of plans (Oliver, Pratt, & Normand, 2015).

Despite the existence of some quantitative studies, qualitative research appears to be the most commonly cited approach used throughout the literature. Due to the individualized nature of the development and implementation of FBAs and BIPs, conducting interviews was one of the most commonly used data collection approaches followed by administering questionnaires and surveys. Oliver et al., (2015) and Roscoe et al., (2015) encouraged future researchers to further explore the concept of training in relation to FBAs and BIPs. The current study aimed to explore information around training approaches and possible needs identified by school personnel involved in the development and implementation of FBAs and BIPs.

Theoretical Rationale

There are several theories aimed at behavior change, primarily from the perspective of health psychology. The most commonly cited approach is, the health action process approach (HAPA), a process that can be used to describe, explain, and predict changes in health behaviors (Schwarzer, 2008). The HAPA model takes into

account pre-intentional motivation processes that lead to behavioral intention, the goal-setting phase, and post-intentional volition processes that lead to actual behavior change, the goal-pursuit phase (Schwarzer, Lippke, & Luszczynska, 2011).

One set of researchers attempted to adapt this approach for use in education. Sanetti, Kratochwill, and Long, (2013a) developed the Planning Realistic Intervention Implementation and Maintenance by Educators (PRIME) model for supporting educators with intervention implementation based on elements of HAPA. As outlined in Figure 1.2, PRIME includes three main components or tiers; Tier 1: Direct Training and Implementation Planning, Tier 2: Implementation Support Strategies, and Tier 3: Performance Feedback (Sanetti et al., 2013a). Using this approach, classroom teachers can develop a plan for consistently delivering a behavioral intervention and a plan for maintaining consistency despite possible barriers that may arise over time (Ghisi, Grace, Thomas, & Oh, 2015).

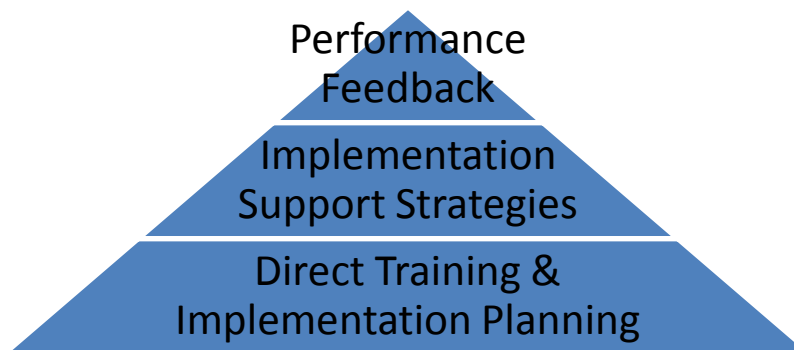


Figure 1.2 Planning Realistic Intervention Implementation and Maintenance by Educators (PRIME) Model (Sanetti et al., 2014). Figure 1.2 outlines shows the visual representation of the tiers associated with supporting an adult during intervention implementation.

The PRIME model (Sanetti, Kratochwill, Collier-Meek, & Long, 2014) uses a tiered system of supports designed to promote implementation of evidenced-based

interventions. The first tier of the model, Direct Training and Implementation Planning, involves direct teaching and training with the implementer on how to deliver the intended intervention as well as discussions to plan how the implementer will deliver the intervention (Sanetti et al., 2014). The direct training method involves teaching staff a four-stage approach to managing problem behaviors including: (a) Problem identification; (b) Problem analysis; (c) Intervention implementation; and (d) Treatment evaluation (Sanetti, Kratochwill, Collier-Meek, and Long, 2014). The second tier of the model, Implementation Support Strategies, involves discussions with the implementer on potential barriers to intervention and how to adapt to address the behavior despite the potential barriers (Sanetti et al., 2014). The third tier of the model, Performance Feedback, involves direct evaluation of the implementer when delivering intervention and discussions about what worked well or what was counterproductive during the process (Sanetti et al., 2014). The PRIME model (Sanetti et al., 2014) adds the context of a school environment to the Health Action Process Approach, a commonly referenced behavior change model referred to in the field of health psychology. For purposes of the current study, the addition of the school context makes the PRIME model (Sanetti et al., 2014) the ideal behavior change theory lens to use when examining the development and implementation of FBAs and BIPs through the experiences of school personnel.

The components of the PRIME model (Sanetti et al., 2014) were based on the Health Action Process Approach which was developed by Schwarzer in 1992. The Health Action Process Approach (HAPA) helps to explain the function of a behavior as well as predicts cognitive and behavioral outcomes within the behavior change process (Sanetti et al., 2014). HAPA operates in two phases: motivational and volitional. In the

motivational phase, an individual develops an intention to change his/her behavior; whereas the volitional phase leads to an actual change in and maintenance of a new behavior (Sanetti et al., 2013a).

According to Sanetti et al., (2013a) common variables within the motivational phase include exploring outcome expectancies, the individual's perceived capability to implement the new behavior and potential risks. Once individuals commit to the intention to change their behavior, they transition to the volitional phase where actual change in behavior occurs (Sanetti et al., 2013a). Research by Schwarzer (2008) and Sanetti et al., (2013a) found that action and coping planning, along with a belief in one's ability to maintain the new behavior over time, are key components within the process of changing behavior change model. Sanetti et al., (2013a) defined action planning as the steps an individual will take to change a behavior; whereas coping planning represents planned responses to potential barriers that might arise during the implementation of the plan.

Within the PRIME model (Sanetti et al., 2014), during the implementation planning component, an individual develops an action plan. The action plan helps to “define intervention steps, increase intervention compatibility through appropriate adaptations, complete detailed logistical planning regarding the implementation of each step and identify potential resource barriers” (Sanetti et al., 2013a, p. 52). During the implementation support phase, an individual develops a coping plan consisting of strategies to promote implementation. The coping plan helps to “identify up to four significant barriers that may be encountered during intervention implementation and develop strategies to navigate each barrier” (Sanetti et al., 2013a, p. 53). The importance

of focusing on the adult responsible for behavior change is a concept worth considering as suggested by Sanetti et al., (2013a) when attempting to address behavior change.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the study was to gain an understanding of the processes for developing FBAs and BIPs as well as the effective steps for implementing BIPs from key stakeholders involved in the behavior management process. School psychologists provided information regarding procedures for plan development since they are often involved with managing student behaviors. Special education teachers provided information regarding implementation of behavior plans because they typically work directly with the student on a regular basis and are most likely to be responsible for implementing the behavior plan. Administrators provided information regarding supporting the development and implementation of behavior plans from a leadership standpoint. The study aimed to identify training approaches for assessing behavior and highlight practices for effectively developing and supporting the implementation of FBAs and BIPs.

Focusing on understanding the extent to which a program or intervention is being implemented as originally intended is defined as treatment fidelity or fidelity of implementation (Lakin & Shannon, 2015). It is important to explore treatment fidelity when trying to determine why evidenced based interventions are not yielding the level of success anticipated despite the availability of effective intervention strategies. Lakin and Shannon (2015) suggested that variation in how an intervention or program is implemented can often explain differences in treatment effectiveness.

Research Questions

To better understand strategies for developing and supporting the implementation of FBAs and BIPs from the perspective of school psychologists, special education teachers and school administrators, the study examined three research questions.

1. What types of training do school psychologists and special education teachers receive to develop functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention plans?
2. What do school psychologists and special education teachers identify as effective strategies for the development and implementation of functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention plans?
3. How is the development and implementation of functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention plans supported by administration?

Potential Significance of the Study

The study aimed to provide insights for school personnel and graduate training programs for school psychologists and special education teachers regarding the practices and structures that need to be in place for effective development of behavioral assessments and implementation of behavior plans. The study also aimed to identify training approaches for assessing behavior and highlight practices for effectively developing and supporting the implementation of FBAs and BIPs. The resulting information can be used to inform common practices for behavior management and highlight possible training strategies in the educational setting.

Management of student behaviors is a continual need in the field of education (Jimerson, Sharkey, Nyborg, & Furlong, 2004; Koller & Bertel, 2006). As noted by Abebe and Hailemariam (2007) school-based personnel are faced with students who

demonstrate behaviors that require a high degree of adult support in order to appropriately manage the behaviors. The use of an FBA is an approach that has been mandated by educational legislation as a method of addressing student behaviors. However, due to the loosely defined guidelines around conducting FBAs, the level of training among personnel appears to vary (Oliver et al., 2015). With varying approaches to training school psychologists on conducting FBAs and supporting teachers with plan implementation, it may be helpful to examine current training practices and the level of preparedness in conducting behavioral assessments once trained. The information from the study may be useful for school leaders, policy makers, school psychologists, and classroom teachers to help inform practices.

Examining the management of student behaviors at the secondary level is important because middle and high school students present with an additional set of challenges related to behavior. Bruhn et al., (2015) highlighted potential reasons managing student behaviors becomes more difficult at the secondary level citing: (a) students have a variety of complex needs and a longer learning history resulting in ingrained behaviors, (b) the landscape of high school is more challenging as students have to navigate a rigorous curricula as well as adolescent social and behavioral demands, and (c) adolescent development is often accompanied by a decline in academic motivation, self-perception and school-related behavior.

Definitions of Terms

Behavior intervention plan (BIP) – involves targeted interventions aimed at reducing the effects of environmental contributors (Crimmins & Farrell, 2006).

Credential – For purposes of this dissertation the term credential will refer to high school diploma or a career development and occupational studies commencement credential (CDOS) (New York State Education Department, 2013a).

Functional behavior assessment (FBA) – Functional behavior assessment is a process of assessing the purpose or ‘function’ of a student’s behavior in relation to its context or environment, so that appropriate interventions can be designed (Iwata et al., 2000).

Planning Realistic Intervention Implementation and Maintenance by Educators (PRIME) – A system of supports to facilitate mediators’ implementation of school-based interventions as they were introduced (Sanetti et al., 2013a).

Treatment integrity – Treatment integrity refers to implementing a school-based intervention as it is outlined or described (Sanetti et al., 2013a).

Chapter Summary

School-based personnel are faced with students who demonstrate challenging and disruptive behavior that can interfere with the students’ functioning in the academic setting (Abebe and Hailemariam, 2007). Dedicating energy to addressing problem behavior within the school setting becomes important when behaviors threaten the safety or disrupt the learning of the student and/or others (Anderson et al., 2015).

When problem behaviors are not addressed, a pattern of discipline referrals is likely to result in increased time out of the classroom (Anderson et al., 2015). Removal from the classroom further interrupts students’ ability to learn as they are missing valuable instruction (Stephan, Connors, Arora, & Brey, 2013). When problem behaviors

are not addressed in school settings, academic achievement can be indirectly impacted (Janosz et al., 2008).

One approach recommended to help students manage behaviors is conducting a functional behavior assessment (FBA) and subsequently developing a behavior intervention plan (BIP). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997 outlined required timeframes for pursuing an FBA and developing a BIP, but information regarding specific procedures on conducting an FBAs and BIPs were loosely defined leading school districts to develop individual approaches for completing these types of plans (Couvillon et al., 2009). The lack of clarity in IDEA has led to a lack of consistency in the procedures for developing FBAs and BIPs, resulting in poorly developed plans and variation in the identified strategies needed to implement the plan resulting in overall ineffective behavior management.

The purpose of the study was to gain an understanding of the processes for developing and implementing FBAs and BIPs from key stakeholders involved in the behavior management process. The study aimed to provide insights for school personnel, school administrators and policy makers regarding the practices and structures that need to be in place for effective development of behavioral assessments and implementation of behavior plans. Chapter 2 includes a summary of the research literature pertinent to the topic. Chapter 3 consists of an overview of the research context, design methodology, data collection, and data analysis procedures. Chapter 4 provides a summary of the results. Chapter 5 includes a discussion of the findings and their connection to the literature. The chapter also includes information about possible implications and

recommendations for future research, practice, education, and executive leadership as well as limitations of the study.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction and Purpose

This chapter provides an overview of functional behavior assessments (FBA) and behavior intervention plans (BIP) including using strength-based assessment approaches within the process. Additionally, the chapter includes available information on staff training and competence for developing and supporting the implementation of FBAs and BIPs. Training approaches for developing FBAs and BIPs as well as gaps in the literature are also identified within the contents of this chapter.

In the literature, the concept of function tends to be viewed from the context of how behavior impacts the environment. This association is often used to describe the purpose of the behavior or to describe the relationship between two variables, typically between an environmental event and an observed behavior in class (Hanley et al., 2003). Scott, Bucalos, Liaupsin, Nelson, Jolivette, and DeShea, (2004) explained how schools are encouraged to use a team approach and a variety of direct and indirect data collection measures to accurately identify the function of a student's behavior.

Understanding the function of a behavior can help school personnel better conceptualize ways to manipulate environmental variables. This in turn, increases the chances of modifying the undesired behavior rather than relying solely on more punitive measures, such as suspensions to address problem behaviors. The concept of understanding the function of behavior is supported by Roscoe et al., (2015) where the researchers concluded: "by identifying the function of problem behavior, reinforcement-

based interventions that include an extinction component can be developed, reducing the need for punishment” (p. 831). Anderson, Rodriguez, and Campbell, (2015) also supported the concept of utilizing functional behavior assessments as a pre-intervention tool. They encouraged using FBAs to determine what environmental variables encourage problematic behavior so that those variables can be altered or manipulated to reinforce desired behavior.

Oliver et al., (2015) and Harrison and Harrison, (2009) focused on the importance of developing the skills of school personnel as a support in the process of developing functional assessments. Harrison and Harrison also made reference to the potential causal relationship that may exist between behavior and relevant environmental factors (2009). As seen in studies by Ingram, Lewis-Palmer, and Sugai, (2005); and Carter and Horner, (2007) the use of case studies using relatively small sample sizes is a common method employed when taking a more in-depth look at addressing individual student problem behaviors.

Research Questions

To better understand strategies for developing and supporting the implementation of FBAs and BIPs from the perspective of school psychologists, special education teachers and school administrators, the study examined three research questions.

1. What types of training do school psychologists and special education teachers receive to develop functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention plans?
2. What do school psychologists and special education teachers identify as effective strategies for the development and implementation of functional

behavior assessments and behavior intervention plans?

3. How is the development and implementation of functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention plans supported by administration?

The identified research questions were examined using a theory developed around the concept of behavior change.

Theory Related to Behavior Change

Prestwich, Webb, and Conner suggested that a theory can provide a framework for testing hypotheses, accumulating evidence, identifying constructs that influence behavior and influence techniques used when developing interventions (2015). A theory can inform intervention development, and interventions can help to test and refine a theory. Prestwich et al., (2015) described this interaction as a reciprocal relationship between theory and intervention. The research of Prestwich et al., (2015) suggested that a theory is needed to develop an intervention and an intervention is needed to refine the theory.

There are several theories focused on behavior change, primarily from the perspective of health psychology. The most commonly cited approach in the research is the Health Action Process Approach (HAPA), a process that can be used to describe, explain and predict changes in health behaviors (Schwarzer, 2008). The HAPA model takes into account pre-intentional motivation processes that lead to behavioral intention, the goal-setting phase, and post-intentional volition processes that lead to actual behavior change, and finally the goal-pursuit phase (Schwarzer, Lippke, & Luszczynska, 2011). During the motivational stage a person develops an intention to act and during the volitional stage the person develops a plan to initiate and maintain the behavior change

(Schwarzer et al., 2011). The HAPA model is a five-step design consisting of: (a) motivation and volition; (b) two volitional phases; (c) postintentional planning; (d) two kinds of mental stimulation; and (e) phase-specific self-efficacy (Schwarzer et al., 2011).

During a 2014 study by Clark and Bassett, the HAPA model was used to explain the attitudes and behaviors contributing to adherence to recommendations and overall rehabilitation outcomes for physiotherapy patients in a medical setting. Using a group of 20 participants with similar shoulder injuries, the study consisted of an intervention aimed at increasing adherence to recommendations. The participants completed a questionnaire to measure their motivation and then worked to develop action and coping plans to assist with adherence to recommendations. Clark and Bassett's results found a moderate to strong correlation between participant levels of confidence and planning in relation to intentions to adhere to recommendations (2014).

Applying the HAPA model to future drinking and driving avoidance in a court/legal setting, Wilson, Sheehan, Palk and Watson, aimed to lower the incidence of recidivism in first time drunk driving offenders (2016). Interviews were conducted with 198 first time offenders at their first court appearance to assess motivation. Follow up interviews were conducted at 6 through 8 month intervals after the date of the original offense with a total of 88 participants from the original sample of 198. Results of the Wilson et al., study concluded that planning plays an important role in drinking and driving avoidance based on the participants reported level of confidence in their ability to avoid future drinking and driving particularly if they planned ways to avoid it over time (2016).

In 2015, Sanetti, Collier-Meek, Long, Byron, and Kratochwill, applied the HAPA model to address difficulties teachers have with implementing interventions in educational settings. The study explored this issue by using implementation planning as a strategy for increasing adherence to the intervention in a school setting with the intention of achieving more effective implementation practices. Participants included four teachers and a student nominated by each teacher for assistance with addressing their challenging behavior. Ultimately, the study results showed that student outcomes improved as teacher adherence to the intervention increased and maintained over time (Sanetti et al., 2015).

The work by Sanetti, Kratochwill, and Long, (2013a) adapted HAPA for use in the field of education and developed the Planning Realistic Intervention Implementation and Maintenance by Educators (PRIME) model. The PRIME model (Sanetti et al., 2014) is used for supporting educators with intervention implementation. PRIME (Sanetti et al., 2014) uses a tiered approach for supporting the implementer during implementation: (Tier 1) Direct Training and Implementation Planning; (Tier 2) Implementation Support Strategies; and (Tier 3) Performance Feedback.

The theory allows classroom teachers to develop a plan for consistently delivering the behavioral intervention and a plan for maintaining that consistency despite possible barriers that may arise over time (Ghisi, Grace, Thomas, & Oh, 2015). Using the components of HAPA as the basis for developing the model, Sanetti et al., (2013a) found that action and coping planning, along with a belief in one's ability to maintain the new behavior over time, are key components when attempting to change a behavior. Sanetti et al., (2013a) defined action planning as the steps an individual takes to change a behavior; whereas coping planning represents planned responses to potential barriers that might

arise during the implementation of the behavior plan. The PRIME model (Sanetti et al., 2014) uses a combination of developing specific steps aimed towards behavior change along with concrete planning for how to maintain the supports needed to continue those steps over time, adding an additional layer to changing behavior.

Sanetti, Kratochwill, and Long, (2013a), looked at ways to support the implementation of an intervention and suggested focusing on the adult who would be responsible for implementation of the behavior intervention plan. Typically, the classroom teacher would likely help ensure that the staff would follow the procedures associated with the behavior intervention plan more consistently. Consistent adherence to the behavior plan would likely elicit behavior change and effectively address problem student behavior (Sanetti et al., 2013a). By focusing on supporting the adult responsible for implementation of the behavior plan, Sanetti et al., (2013a) suggested that behavior change is more likely to occur.

Functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention plans

There has been much exploration around the topic of functional behavior assessments (FBA) and their uses within educational settings. A 2002 study by March and Horner outlined the underlying premise behind developing an FBA to assist in the development of a behavior intervention plan (BIP) with strategies that target specific problem behavior, with an understanding of the function or need that is being met when the individual displays the problem behavior. March and Horner, (2002) examined the feasibility and utility of functional behavior assessment procedures in a general education setting using a qualitative research design. Additionally, they sought to determine if there was a relationship between function-based behavior support and decreasing problem

behavior or increasing academic achievement. Descriptive analysis was used in the March and Horner study while collecting a summary of behavior changes during a targeted group intervention using a sample population of 24 students from Grades 6 through 8 (2002).

Although a causal relationship was not determined, March and Horner, (2002) unearthed three major conclusions about the importance of using descriptive FBA information when developing a BIP. First, interventions developed using information obtained from the FBA were more successful at reducing problem student behavior. Second, this process was also useful with improving social behaviors in the students being studied. Finally, using descriptive assessment procedures during the FBA contributed to the development of effective function based interventions (March & Horner, 2002).

In an attempt to take a more in depth look at the effectiveness of behavior plans in the educational setting, Ingram, Lewis-Palmer, and Sugai, (2005) examined the effectiveness of behavior intervention plans using functional behavior assessment processes versus intervention strategies developed without the use of function based processes. Using qualitative methods, Ingram et al., (2005) used a case study approach to study two male students in the sixth grade with behavior problems. A single subject research design was used with each participant to demonstrate a functional relationship between student response and function based versus non-function based behavior plans. Using a single subject design allowed the researcher to exercise control of the intervention in a single individual to identify relationships between variables.

Data were collected by completing semi-structured interviews with teachers and participants as well as direct observations of the participants. The data were then analyzed through a process of coding the information collected and identifying themes. Results indicated that the use of behavior intervention plans developed using function based assessment processes were associated with a higher probability of lowering the frequency of problem behavior (Ingram et al., 2005).

Building on the work of March and Horner, (2002) and Ingram et al., (2005), Carter and Horner, (2007) set out to assess the value of incorporating functional behavior assessment processes into a prescribed manualized intervention designed to address problem behavior. Using a case study approach with one participant, a 6-year-old male student, as the focus of the study, Carter and Horner, (2007) explored the effect of incorporating functional behavior assessment processes to a prescribed manualized behavior management intervention in an educational setting. The participant completed two phases categorized as *baseline and coaching*. The baseline phase referred to observations within the natural setting and the coaching phase, referred to information obtained once the student was taught the prescribed skills of the manualized intervention method. Data were collected using a Functional Assessment Checklist developed by the researchers to interview the classroom teacher as well as completing three 20-minute observations using a Functional Assessment Observation Form developed by the researchers. Carter and Horner, (2007) ultimately found that incorporating functional behavior assessments into the design of the more prescribed behavior management system may help to increase the likelihood of positive behavior change.

Using a qualitative research design, Blood and Neel, (2007) explored whether FBA practices could be used to address significant behaviors with a population that has historically displayed significant problem behaviors such as, explosive/aggressive outbursts or substance abuse. Using a sample population consisting of 43 students from first grade through high school classified as Emotionally or Behaviorally Disturbed (EBD), participating in a self-contained classroom from a mid-size school district, Blood and Neel, (2007) conducted record reviews and completed teacher interviews as data collection techniques to obtain the information for the study.

Study results indicated that it was slightly more likely that a BIP would be written if an FBA had been conducted. However, conducting FBAs was not standard practice among participants working with the EBD population (Blood & Neel, 2007). Other researchers have reported some success with using function based approaches within the behavior management practices used with the EBD population (Reid, Epstein, Pastor, & Ryser, 2000; Cosden, Panteleakos, Gutierrez, & Barazani, 2004). Despite support from literature indicating better outcomes when managing problem behaviors using function based approaches, Blood and Neel, (2007) discovered that conducting FBAs was not common practice while working with the EBD population.

Functional behavior assessments can be completed using a variety of methods and approaches, such as indirect assessment, descriptive assessment and functional analysis. As summarized by Roscoe, Phillips, Kelly, Farber, and Dube, (2015) indirect assessment includes interviews and questionnaires and does not typically involve direct observation of the individual being assessed. Descriptive assessment usually involves direct observation of the individual being assessed in order to try to identify any events that

frequently happen right before or right after the behavior is displayed. Functional analysis is considered the most involved approach and involves a combination of indirect assessments, descriptive assessments, manipulating environmental elements, and direct observation of the individual (Oliver et al., 2015; Roscoe et al., 2015).

The use of strength-based assessments as a component of functional analysis has also become an increasingly popular concept within the research. In 2013 Nickerson and Fishman explored the link between the use of strength-based assessments to promote resilience in youth. Strength-based assessments provide a mechanism for measuring an individual's emotional and behavioral skills and characteristics that enhance coping skills, promotes social and academic development along with a number of other attributes that can be used to promote resilience (Nickerson and Fishman, 2013). Data obtained from strength-based assessments can provide valuable information that can serve a multitude of uses including the development of individualized plans (Nickerson and Fishman, 2013).

Cox (2008) outlined strategies for assessing children's strengths, with a plan to use the information to develop interventions designed to build upon their strengths while also addressing a problem behavior area. The strategies include conducting a personal strengths assessment, recognition of student strengths and then the subsequent development of strength-based interventions based on that information (Cox, 2008). By taking a more positive approach building upon student strengths, a common advantage becomes the potential to enhance a students' motivation or desire to change.

Effectiveness of Behavior Management Techniques at Addressing Behaviors

Bruhn et al., (2015) examined the effects of functional assessment-based interventions (FABI) with high school students. Using two separate participants, both in self-contained classroom settings at the high school level, Bruhn et al., (2015) completed comprehensive functional assessments to develop interventions specifically targeting those functions and found a multi-component FABI can decrease target behaviors for high school students. Bruhn et al., (2015) recognized conducting the study using students in a self-contained classroom setting may have influenced the outcomes of the study because the students remained in one setting throughout the day and recommended replicating the study in a traditional general education setting where students travel from class to class.

Researchers have begun to explore the concept of examining student strengths and looking for ways to include those strengths within behavior management techniques (Bozic, 2013; Cosden et al., 2004; Reid et al., 2000; Walrath, Mandell, Holden, & Santiago, 2004). The idea behind examining student strengths as a component of assessing student behavior is recommended as a way of getting a more comprehensive look at a child, which can lead to a better understanding of what is causing and maintaining problem behaviors (Jimerson, Sharkey, Nyborg, & Furlong, 2004). Once the cause of the problem behavior is understood, interventions can be developed that will be aimed towards addressing the behavior using strategies based on the underlying function of that behavior.

Assessing the benefits related to the use of strength based assessments is another component to consider when developing behavior plans. In 2000, Reid et al. attempted to investigate the use of an alternative-strength based assessment using a 52-item

questionnaire, the Behavioral and Emotional Rating Scale (BERS) to assess the behavioral and emotional ratings of a sample of 418 students between the ages of 7 – 18 years old in a school environment. Using quantitative research methods, Reid et al., (2000) sought to investigate the use of alternative strength based perspectives to collect information that could be used to address problem behaviors differentiating across three populations: students classified with Learning Disabilities (LD), students classified with Emotional Behavioral Disorder (EBD), and students classified as nondisabled.

The BERS measures a student's level of functioning in five areas: (a) interpersonal strengths; (b) family involvement; (c) intrapersonal strengths; (d) school functioning; and (e) affective strengths (Reid et al., 2000). Using a Likert scale, students were rated on each item to determine which items were most like the behavior being displayed by the student. Reid et al., (2000) found the BERS could be used to determine a difference in behavioral and emotional functioning of youth with a classification of a disability versus youth who were classified as nondisabled. However, the results did not show a difference between the level of functioning in students classified LD and those classified EBD (Reid et al., 2000). The researchers implied that clarity in understanding of the individual's level of functioning may assist in the development of more effective behavior interventions (Reid et al., 2000).

Similar to Reid et al. (2000), Cox (2006) also used the Behavioral and Emotional Rating Scale (BERS) as the strength based assessment tool used to gather information about a youth's functioning. Cox (2006) assessed the benefits and barriers related to the incorporation of strength based assessment strategies when trying to address significant problem behaviors using quantitative methods. By focusing on 84 youth between the ages

of 5 – 18 with at least one mental health diagnosis, Cox (2006) utilized a pretest-posttest randomized block design consisting of an experimental group who were assessed using the behavioral and emotional rating scale (BERS) versus a control group receiving traditional mental health treatment measures.

Results revealed that youth from the experimental group, who were working with strength-based therapists, showed greater overall improvement in their level of functioning than the youth who participated in the control group (Cox, 2006). These results suggested the use of strength based assessments, plus the addition of a therapist who practices strength-based treatment procedures, adds to the success in improving the functioning of youth (Cox, 2006).

In an attempt to explore the use of strength based assessment practices with populations identified as exhibiting significant problem behaviors, Cosden, Panteleakos, Gutierrez, and Barazani, (2004) examined the use of strength based assessment approaches for youth with substance abuse problems. Cosden et al., (2004) attempted to determine if the identification of the strengths that a youth possesses has an impact on youth who are beginning to abuse substances, and may be used as a means of disrupting those negative behaviors and deterring the potential need for more intensive interventions.

In addition to exploring the impact of student strengths, Cosden et al., explored the reasons for school personnel, specifically, school psychologists, to use strength-based assessment procedures when working with youth who present with substance abuse concerns (2004). Cosden et al., (2004) identified a push for working to support the youth within their home and school environments rather than placing youth outside of the home

and enrolling them in separate schools as a reason to involve school psychologists in the use strength-based assessment approaches when working with youth.

Cosden et al., (2004) first used a quantitative approach to examine 119 juveniles between 13 – 17 years of age who completed a 12-month Juvenile Drug Treatment Court Program. The youth were assessed using the Adolescent Addiction Severity Index (AASI), the Youth Self-Report (YSR), and the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Scales-II (FACES-II) to determine current levels of functioning. Additionally, their parents completed the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL) and the FACES-II (Cosden, et al., 2004). These instruments were completed at the start of the youth's involvement with the drug court program and then readministered after the youth had completed 12 months of treatment.

Results suggested a moderate correlation between strengths and functional impairment; following the use of strength based assessment approaches youth showed an increase in strengths, higher school competency and decreased problem behaviors (Cosden et al., 2004). Both youth and their parents noted increased strengths in multiple aspects of the youths' life, including higher school competencies and declined engagement in substance abuse and other disruptive behaviors (Cosden et al., 2004). To further examine the use of strength based assessments, Cosden et al., (2004) completed an in depth case study using one participant. A 17-year-old male from the original sample population was selected to examine the use of formal and informal strength based assessment measures to address problem behaviors.

Cosden et al., (2004) planned to identify specific levels of the youth's strengths to incorporate that information in the development of interventions with a hope to improve

outcomes and increase the rate of success. The youth completed two facilitated assessment meetings, where information was collected regarding the youth's values, personal qualities, and motivation for change (Cosden et al., 2004). Results of Cosden's study suggested there is value in utilizing strength based assessments with youth; as one youth showed an increase in engagement and a decrease in problem behavior after participating in strength-based assessment practices (Cosden et al., 2004).

Using qualitative research methods, Bozic, (2013), conducted a multiple case study aimed at investigating the incorporation of strength based assessment into educational psychology work. The hope was to identify actual and potential individual strengths at the personal, interpersonal and systems levels that could then be incorporated into individualized behavior interventions (Bozic, 2013). Bozic, (2013) utilized strength assessment checklists and interview procedures to assess individual student functioning in a sample of five cases. Youth were interviewed using the Child and Adolescent Strengths Assessment (CASA) and the Assets Interview (AI). Additionally, using the Target, Monitoring and Evaluation (TME) Scale, the youths' overall levels of functioning were identified (Bozic, 2013). The TME served as a pretest, posttest measure to monitor and track the progress of the youth throughout the intervention period (Bozic, 2013).

Results showed the use of these assessment procedures highlighted strengths that could be used in the development of behavior interventions targeting specific concerns. Of the five participants involved in the study, four showed positive changes when strength based assessment results were included in the development of behavioral interventions (Bozic, 2013). As a recommendation, Bozic, (2013) encouraged further exploration of this concept using a larger sample size to see if similar results are found.

Implementation of Behavior Intervention Plans

Although school psychologists are typically responsible for coordinating the development of behavior plans, classroom teachers are usually responsible for the implementation of the plan. Sanetti, Fallon, & Collier-Meek, (2013b) shed light on the concept of using an adult behavior change theory as a means of supporting the adult responsible for implementing a behavior intervention plan. Sanetti et al., (2013b) supported the use of a four-stage consultation model including: (a) problem identification; (b) problem analysis; (c) intervention implementation; and (d) intervention evaluation.

The problem identification phase involves defining the specific problem to be addressed, collecting initial baseline progress monitoring data and developing an intervention goal. The problem analysis phase consists of identifying an intervention to be used to address the problem and reach the intervention goal. During the intervention implementation phase, the student receives the intervention and during the intervention evaluation phase, goal attainment, treatment integrity data and plan effectiveness are evaluated.

Like Sanetti et al., (2013b), Roscoe et al., (2015) examined implementation techniques in an attempt to assess the degree to which various types of functional assessments were implemented. Results indicated that although most practitioners believed functional analysis could be the most informative for selecting behavioral treatment, only slightly more than 30% of practitioners indicated regularly using functional analysis to inform the development of behavior plans. Some of the variation occurs due to the lack of clear guidance from legislation on how to develop an FBA

(Roscoe et al., 2015). Additionally, researchers have also continued to examine implementation techniques in an attempt to determine which methods are most effective at maintaining treatment integrity (Roscoe et al., 2015; Sanetti et al., 2013b).

Sanetti et al., (2013b) reported that implementation of most school-based interventions are completed by adults and, therefore, focusing on adult behavior change is a required component of addressing any student behaviors via the use of a behavior intervention plan (Sanetti et al., 2013b). Sanetti et al., (2013a) adopted the PRIME model for use with supporting the implementation of interventions within an educational setting and suggest using it as a strategy for impacting adult behavior change in relation to the implementation of behavior intervention plans. Components of the PRIME model include: “(a) implementation planning, (b) assessment of implementation intention and sustainability self-efficacy, and (c) strategies to increase implementation intention and/or sustainability self-efficacy” (Sanetti et al., 2013a, p. 52).

The development of an implementation plan is considered one of the key components of the PRIME model; the plan includes both an action plan and a coping plan (Sanetti et al., 2013b). The action plan consists of: “defining intervention steps, increasing intervention compatibility through appropriate adaptations, completing detailed logistical planning regarding implementation of each step in the context and identifying potential resource barriers” (Sanetti et al., 2013b). Coping plans are used to guide the person responsible for implementing the plan with the process of hypothesizing potential barriers that may be encountered during intervention implementation and develop strategies to address each barrier (Sanetti et al., 2013b). As suggested by Sanetti et al., (2013b), using the PRIME model may potentially increase the effectiveness of

behavior plans by focusing on the adult responsible for implementation ensuring ongoing use of the interventions.

Staff Training Related to Plan Development and Implementation

Throughout the literature, training typically refers to obtaining or transferring knowledge or skills. There are multiple forums where trainings typically occur including during formal education such as graduate school or while in the work environment. Training can be delivered through a variety of modalities including formal processes such as lectures and workshops or less formal processes such as discussions with colleagues (Milhem, Abushamsieh, & Arostegui, 2014). In a 2016 article, Dikilitas added support for the use of in-service trainings in the form of seminars and presentations as an innovative professional development strategy to promote learning in professional environments.

When considering ways to promote implementation fidelity, Stetler, Ritchie, Rycroft-Malone, and Charns, examined the role of the leader in promoting the use of evidenced based practices and implementing interventions with fidelity (2014). The role of the leader is to help facilitate supporting the successful implementation of an intervention by remaining engaged in the process and providing support to staff at each stage of implementation (Stetler et al., 2014). Klein, Ziegert, Knight, and Xiao, (2006) sought to add to the literature on the role of a leader by focusing on an emergency medical setting and identified the five broad functions of a leader as: (a) structuring and directing, (b) intervening actively, (c) monitoring, (d) motivating and inspiring, and (e) teaching, coaching, and training.

The study by Aasekjaer, Waehle, Ciliska, Nordtvedt, and Hjalmlhult, examined the leaders role in supporting the implementation of evidenced based practices (EBPs) in a clinical setting with the aim of identifying successful strategies (2016). Based in Norway, coming from a health perspective, the study focused on the experiences of 20 health professionals who had completed a postgraduate training program on EBPs (Aasekjaer et al., 2016). Using the grounded theory *tailoring principles*, Aasekjaer et al., tailored individual strategies according to preexisting barriers and facilitators in the workplace (2016) when supporting the implementation of EBPs.

Within the tailoring principles theory, the role of middle-range managers became important for coordinating and supporting the process for implementing EBPs (Aasekjaer et al., 2016). Increased adherence to implementation of EBPs was noted when managers provided structural and facilitative support including: (a) providing coordinated training, coaching, and frequent performance assessments, (b) providing infrastructure needed for timely training, skillful supervision and coaching, and regular process and outcome evaluations, and (c) resources, regulations and strategies employed to facilitate an environment for implementation of EBPs (Aasekjaer et al., 2016). Middle-range managers and health professionals need to understand principles of EBP in order to improve patient care and successfully implement EBPs into practice (Aasekjaer et al., 2016).

Many researchers have attempted to get a sense of how functional behavior assessments are being used in practice. Oliver et al., (2015) and Roscoe et al., (2015) described how functional behavior assessment practices were assessed via the use of survey questionnaires. Roscoe et al., (2015) explored changes in practices over the 10

years since the issue of FBA uses had last been explored. Additionally, Roscoe et al., (2015) wanted to expand on previous literature by providing clear definitions for the various assessment categories and including subjects who were Board Certified Behavior Analysis (BCBA), which suggests that behavior management is a regular part of their job responsibilities.

Roscoe et al., (2015) used a quantitative approach with nonrandom sampling methods including pulling names from mailing lists of individuals identified as BCBA's and an online certification registry geared towards behavior analysts. These efforts resulted in a total of 205 individuals willing to participate in the study. Roscoe et al., (2015) developed a 21-item survey that included pilot testing and content reviews. Results of the study indicated that the majority of respondents reported using descriptive assessment more than functional analysis when attempting to identify the function driving a problem behavior (Roscoe et al., 2015). Despite the majority of respondents reporting a tendency to use descriptive assessment measures, 67.8% of the sample reported that the functional analysis approach was the most informative for selecting a behavioral intervention (Roscoe et al., 2015).

The participants reported insufficient time or materials as two of the main barriers to completing functional behavior assessments (Roscoe et al., 2015). One suggestion to address time constraints was the use of modified assessment measures to collect data and needed information within a shorter timeframe. Other barriers identified were the lack of trained staff and a lack of support or acceptance of the FBA process. Roscoe et al., (2015) reported being surprised that lack of training was identified as a barrier and identified this as an area that may need more exploration.

Similar to Roscoe et al., (2015), Oliver et al., (2015) explored current training practices in behavior analysis regarding functional behavior assessments utilizing a quantitative research design and sought to obtain a larger sample size than previous studies. The researchers targeted participants who were specifically trained in behavior analysis by recruiting behavior analysts who were certified by the Behavior Analysis Certification Board; a total of 724 individuals completed surveys. Oliver et al., (2015) developed two surveys; the first was administered to all study participants and covered information related to demographics, methods of assessment, barriers to completing FBAs and training in conducting behavior analysis. A second survey was completed by the participants who identified themselves as educators at the college level, which included 18 questions to assess their training practices (Oliver et al., 2015).

Comparable to previous findings, descriptive assessments were reported to be the most commonly used assessment practice based on survey results (Oliver et al., 2015). When considering barriers to using functional analysis approaches when completing FBAs the two most common barriers identified by respondents were lack of time and lack of materials. Additionally, when supporting the development of FBAs using functional analysis lack of trained staff to assist and lack of staff approval or buy-in were also identified as barriers. The finding by Oliver et al., (2015) supported the conclusion that continued work may be needed to explore why these issues continue to remain as barriers and what can be done to address these barriers.

Oliver et al., (2015) also sought to understand training methods by assessing how much training each practitioner reported having as well as how much emphasis college educators were placing on each of the various training techniques during their course

work. Based on the study, 83% of the sample reported having formal training in conducting functional behavior assessments, which is expected based on their certification as behavior analysts. The training could be categorized as a combination of four methods including: taking course work (reported by 86% of the sample), reading relevant literature (reported by 80% of the sample), attending professional workshops (reported by 57% of the sample) or receiving on the job training (reported by 70% of the sample). Since the participants were trained behavior analysts most of them participated in some specific training related to FBAs and BIPs; however, they commonly reported lack of trained staff to assist in the process as a barrier to using functional analysis approaches to developing FBAs. Overall, results of the study completed by Oliver et al., (2015) showed a similar trend to what has been being reported throughout the literature suggesting that more emphasis should be placed on providing training on FBAs and BIPs.

Researchers have also studied how functional behavior assessments are conducted from the perspective of school personnel who are typically involved in the process of developing FBAs (Connors, Arora, Curtis, & Stephan, 2015; Couvillon, Bullock, & Gable, 2009 and; VanAcker, Boreson, Gable, & Potterton, 2005). VanAcker et al., (2005) sought to assess the adequacy of functional behavior assessment plans regarding best practices or training approaches in a school setting. Using quantitative methods, they examined the impact that having a team member who received training on conducting FBAs may have on the quality of the FBA produced by that team. VanAcker et al., 2005, identified school personnel as: school psychologists, behavior specialists and special education teachers and used a rating scale to assess the thoroughness of the behavior plans that were submitted.

VanAcker et al., (2005) examined the adequacy of behavior plans, specifically after several school personnel from varying districts throughout the state participated in an intensive three-day training, which was designed around the development of functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention plans. The sample included school personnel with varying levels of training ranging from no formalized training in developing behavior plans to individuals who participated in a three-day intensive training on FBA and BIP development.

VanAcker et al., (2005) identified a couple major findings based on their study: First, the majority of the behavior plans that were submitted had at least one member on the team with significant training in conducting FBAs. Second, the majority of the behavior plans that were submitted displayed problems in more than one critical area. Third, a quarter of the behavior plans submitted failed to identify the proposed function of the behavior. Resulting recommendations based on findings by VanAcker et al., (2005) indicated that school personnel appeared to require more training and education related to the process of developing functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention plans.

These results are similar to findings by Couvillon, Bullock, and Gable, (2009) regarding the need for additional training of staff who examined variables or barriers that impact the development of a functional behavior assessment. Couvillon et al., (2009) focused on exploring the specific barriers school personnel face when conducting FBAs, and developing and implementing BIPs. Within the study, four topics of focus were considered, starting with identifying behavioral problems encountered in school settings. Next was an exploration of common disciplinary responses to behavioral problems,

followed by a focus on understanding how functional behavior assessments were being used. Finally, the researchers examined how behavioral interventions were being applied (Couvillon et al., 2009).

Using quantitative research methods, Couvillon et al., (2009) collected the information from providers by way of an online survey, receiving a total of 134 responses from providers working with the K-12 population. Couvillon et al., (2009) completed a comparative analysis of the survey results to determine which behaviors teachers address in school settings and the discipline actions utilized to address problem student behaviors. Based on the survey results, 54% of the respondents reported formal coursework and in-service training on developing FBAs. Approximately 21% of the respondents indicated only participating in formal coursework, while 10% reported only attending in-service trainings. Roughly 15% of respondents reported no training on completing FBAs.

Based on the initial results of the comparative analysis, Couvillon et al., (2009) attempted to look at associations between years of experience, years in the current position, and setting, by way of a multivariate analysis of variance. Couvillon et al., (2009) determined, the more years of experience, the more likely it was for the individual to receive some form of training on conducting FBAs. Couvillon et al., (2009) suggested that ongoing consultation and evaluation are critical components to the implementation of a successful intervention plan. Similar to what was determined by VanAcker et al., (2005), results of the study by Couvillon et al., (2009) also supported a need for additional training among service providers and school personnel working with students with problem behaviors.

Connors, Arora, Curtis, and Stephan, (2015) explored the factors that may be related to behavior assessment practices using a mixed methods approach to survey and interview a national sample of school mental health clinicians. During their study, they explored the factors that may be related to the use and function of behavior assessment in real-world, clinical settings and schools. Connors et al., (2015) sought to identify current assessment practices regarding the use of behavior assessments, ease of implementation, and ease of use of assessment tools and overall attitudes towards behavior assessment.

There were 144 school mental health clinicians as participants in the Connors et al., study (2015). In order to assess clinician attitudes towards assessments, the researchers used a modified version of the Evidence-Based Practice Attitude Scale. This scale yields four subscales, the first measuring clinicians' openness and willingness to use new practices that were more structured (Connors et al., 2015). The second scale measures the extent to which clinicians utilize evidence based practices. The third scale measures the appeal of the use of evidence based practices to clinicians and the final scale examines the clinicians' attitudes regarding the clinical usefulness of evidenced based practices (Connors et al., 2015).

To collect more detailed information, semi-structured interviews were completed with 14 participants from the original sample of 144 school mental health clinicians, using an interview protocol of open-ended questions developed by the research team (Connors et al., 2015). Results indicated difficulty reaching parents, parents' difficulty understanding the assessment questions and students' difficulty understanding assessment questions as the top three barriers clinicians found with using evidenced based assessment practices (Connors et al., 2015).

Results also yielded several suggestions including the need for creating in-service training opportunities and other strategies to address the barriers to completing functional behavior assessments (Connors et al., 2015). The results also highlighted a commonality discovered related to the study participants. Those participants with higher levels of clinical experience typically displayed less openness to engage in evidenced based practices (Connors et al., 2015). Similar to findings from studies by Connors et al., (2015), Couvillon et al., (2009), and VanAcker et al., (2005) this study also noted a push for the availability of ongoing training in behavior assessment practices.

Clark and Bassett, (2014) used the health action process approach (HAPA) to address patient adherence to a rehabilitation therapy program in a medical setting. The researchers chose this model based on the ability to successfully bridge the intention-behavior gap by using action and coping plans. The intention-behavior gap refers to the process that occurs between an individual's desire to change a behavior and the actual follow through with a plan to change the behavior (Clark & Bassett, 2014). The study used a one group prospective design following 20 participants over the course of 4 weeks as they participated in clinic-based physiotherapy after a medical procedure (Clark & Bassett, 2014). With assistance from the researcher, study participants developed action and coping plans based on the HAPA model; the researchers determined, the HAPA model could provide a framework for supporting an individuals' adherence to treatment and ultimately lead to improved treatment outcomes (Clark & Bassett, 2014).

Gaps and Recommendations for Future Research

Despite support from literature indicating better outcomes when managing problem behaviors using function based approaches, Blood and Neel, (2007) discovered

that conducting FBAs was not common practice while working with more challenging populations such as the Emotionally Behaviorally Distributed (EBD) population. According to Blood and Neel, (2007) students classified as EBD tend to exhibit behavioral outbursts that are likely to warrant the development of a functional behavior assessment. It might be helpful to expand on the use of functional behavior assessments by replicating the study with other populations to add to the literature.

Connors et al., (2015), Couvillon et al., (2009), and VanAcker et al., (2005) suggested that school personnel should receive training in FBA procedures in order to limit the number of untrained individuals completing these plans, and ultimately lead to the development of more effective strategies for addressing problem behaviors. Carter and Horner, (2007) encouraged future researchers to replicate their study by incorporating FBA practices into other manualized behavior management programs to see if the results can be replicated. Based on the findings from Bozic, (2013) future researchers were encouraged to replicate the study using a larger sample size and alternative strength based assessment models. Based on the literature, it would appear that professionals may need more direct training on FBA practices in order to more effectively address problem behaviors. As demonstrated in this literature review, the use of FBA continues to be a growing topic in the field of behavior management research.

Chapter Summary

In attempting to understand strategies for developing and supporting the implementation of behavior intervention plans from the perspective of school psychologists, special education teachers, and school administrators the current study focused on strategies and training techniques reported by study participants. Scott et al.,

(2004) explained how schools are encouraged to use a team approach and a variety of direct and indirect data collection measures in order to accurately identify the function of a student's behavior when developing a behavior intervention plans. Scott et al., (2004) suggested understanding the function of a behavior can help school personnel better conceptualize ways to manipulate environmental variables in hopes of modifying the undesired behavior rather than relying solely on more punitive measures such as suspensions to address behaviors.

Sanetti et al., (2013a) looked at ways to support the implementation of an intervention and suggested focusing on the adult who would be responsible for implementation of the behavior intervention plan through the adoption of the PRIME model. Using this approach, classroom teachers can develop a plan for consistently delivering the behavioral intervention and a plan for maintaining that consistency despite possible barriers that may arise over time (Ghisi et al., 2015). Consistent adherence to the behavior plan would likely elicit behavior change and effectively address problem student behavior (Sanetti et al., 2013b). By focusing on supporting the adult responsible for implementation of the behavior plan, Sanetti et al., (2013a) suggested that behavior change is more likely to occur. Chapter 3 will consist of an overview of the research context, design methodology, data collection, and data analysis procedures.

Chapter 3: Research Design Methodology

General Perspective

The purpose of the current study was to gain an understanding of the processes for developing and implementing FBAs and BIPs from key stakeholders involved in the behavior management process. School psychologists provided information regarding procedures for plan development since these roles within the school system tend to be involved with managing student behaviors. Special education teachers provided information regarding implementation of behavior intervention plans (BIP) because they typically work directly with the student on a regular basis and are most likely to be responsible for implementing the behavior plan. Administrators provided information regarding the development and implementation of FBAs and BIPs from a leadership standpoint. The current study aimed to identify training approaches for assessing behavior and the practices that participants identify for effectively developing and implementing behavior plans. The study was intended to provide insights for school personnel, and graduate training programs for school psychologists and special education teachers regarding the practices and structures that need to be in place for effective development of behavioral assessments and implementation of behavior plans.

Research Methodology

In focusing on individual experiences, the current study utilized a qualitative research design using an interview approach to examine the process of developing and implementing FBAs and BIPs from the perspective of school psychologists, special

education teachers and school administrators. Creswell, (2013) describes qualitative research as an interpretative approach to gaining meaning from the world. The use of a qualitative approach for the current study allowed the researcher to connect with participants in order to gain an understanding of their perceptions on the process of developing and implementing FBAs and BIPs. According to Creswell, (2013) a qualitative research design is helpful when exploring the meaning that an individual ascribes to a particular problem or issue. Based on the definition of qualitative research, attempting to explore the behavior plan process using this research design was the most appropriate for answering the research questions with the current study.

Creswell, (2013) identified semi-structured interviews as a helpful mechanism for trying to explore the perceptions of others. An advantage of using the semi-structured interview approach is that it provides a guide for the interview, yet gives the interviewer the flexibility to stray from the guide and follow topical trajectories that arise during the conversation (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). The combination of allowing the interviewer to prepare questions and provide a structure for the interview but still allowing participants the freedom to express their views in their own terms, can help influence the depth and richness of the information shared during the interview. In a qualitative approach, the researcher is a key instrument throughout the process from data collection to interpretation and analysis (Creswell, 2014).

In preparation for conducting the current study, the researcher completed an online training provided by the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) on conducting research involving human subjects. During the current study, the researcher obtained consent from the organization where the research was conducted, by meeting

with a member of the senior leadership team to share the purpose and possible significance of the research, interview protocol and potential implications for the field of education. The researcher received approval from the St. John Fisher College Institutional Review Board by outlining the specifications of the proposed study and the details of the research design process. Being mindful of research ethics, the researcher sought participants who did not work directly with the researcher so as to avoid any potential ethical conflicts during data collection.

Research Questions

There are several dimensions to consider when examining behavior change. For the purposes of the current study, the area of focus related to the adults responsible for developing implementing and supporting the implementation of FBAs and BIPs aimed at addressing problem student behavior. Sanetti, Kratochwill, and Long, (2013a) highlighted the importance of placing an emphasis on adult behavior change to ensure behavior intervention plans aimed at addressing problem student behavior are completed consistently and maintained overtime. Sanetti et al., (2013a) suggested the use of the Planning Realistic Intervention Implementation and Maintenance by Educators (PRIME) model for supporting educators with intervention implementation. PRIME is defined as a system of supports to facilitate mediators' implementation of school-based interventions as they were introduced (Sanetti et al., 2013a).

To better understand strategies for developing and supporting the implementation of behavior plans from the perspective of school psychologists, special education teachers and school administrators, the study examined three research questions.

1. What types of training do school psychologists and special education teachers

receive to develop functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention plans?

2. What do school psychologists and special education teachers identify as effective strategies for the development and implementation of functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention plans?
3. How is the development and implementation of functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention plans supported by administration?

Research Context

The research was conducted at an educational setting in a Western New York county populated by an estimated 749,600 people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). The racial makeup of the county consisted of approximately: 71.1% White, 16.2% Black, 8.3% Non-White Hispanic, 3.7% Asian, 0.4% American Indian and Native Alaskan, and 0.1% Pacific Islander (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). The median income per household was reported as \$52,501, per capita, and 14.2% of the population lived below the poverty level (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015).

For the study, the research was completed in a K-12 educational setting designed as an intermediate education unit that provides shared educational programs and services to nine component school districts. The setting was designed to offer an economical alternative for districts to provide programs and services to students presenting with significant educational needs. The setting served students who presented with a variety of ability levels and educational needs. For purposes of the current study, the described setting will be referred to as The Murray Educationally Geared Association (MEGA).

According to educational statistics, approximately 53% of students in New York State were considered economically disadvantaged and the racial breakdown of the total student population consisted of approximately: 45% White, 25% Hispanic, 18% African American, 9% Asian, 2% Multi-racial and 1% American Indian (NYSED, 2015). At MEGA, the racial makeup of the student population was: 69.6% White, 19.4% Black, 7% Non-White Hispanic, 2% Pacific Islander, 1% Asian, and 1% American Indian and Native American (Murray Educationally Geared Association, Report Card 2014). In order to receive services at MEGA, all students must meet eligibility criteria under one of the 13 recognized educational disabilities in New York State and be receiving special education services, as outlined by state education law.

Research Participants

The current research focused on the experiences of school psychologists, special education teachers and school administrators who were involved in the development and implementation of functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention plans. At the time of the study, there were approximately 20 school psychologists, 77 special education teachers and 10 administrators who had direct involvement with the FBA process, employed at MEGA. For purposes of the current study, only those individuals who primarily worked with students age 14 or older and had experience with the process of functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention plans were invited to participate. The study specifically targeted staff supporting students at the secondary level because these students typically interact with multiple teachers throughout the school day causing more potential for variation in the delivery of interventions across staff.

Participants were recruited using a defined set of eligibility criteria (Appendix A). The research sample included three school psychologists, three special education teachers and three school administrators who were employed by MEGA, at the time of the study and were involved in managing student behaviors using behavior plans. The research sample consisted of participants who were working in the field of education and had experience with functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention plans.

School psychologists were selected because they were typically involved in the process of developing FBAs and BIPs within the school setting. Special education teachers were selected because they were typically responsible for the implementation of the behavior intervention plans as they work most directly with the student for an extended period of the school day. School administrators were selected because they were involved in the process of managing student behaviors from the standpoint of supporting staff with plan development and implementation. As a team, school psychologists, special education teachers and school administrators work collaboratively to address problem student behavior. As a token of appreciation for their participation in the current study, each participant received a thank you note and a small gift card after completing their interview.

Instruments to be Used in Data Collection

After receiving approval from St. John Fisher College's IRB and MEGA, the researcher utilized purposeful sampling to identify school psychologists, special education teachers and school administrators at MEGA that met the following eligibility criteria:

1. Participant must be a school psychologist, special education teacher or

administrator.

2. Participant must have experience working with students 14 years of age or older.
3. Participant must have experience with developing, implementing or supporting the implementation of functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention plans.

Using the eligibility criteria, the researcher worked with the director at MEGA to compile a list of eligible participants. The director then sent an e-mail (Appendix B) to each potential participant providing some information about the study, the researchers contact information and instructions to contact the researcher if they were interested in participating in the study. As participants expressed interest, the researcher provided them with a copy of the informed consent (Appendix C) and scheduled a time and location for completing the individual interviews. Interviews were held in a variety of mutually agreed upon locations and each interview was completed in less than 60 minutes.

Interview questions were developed using the underlying principles of the PRIME model (Sanetti et al., 2014) and were framed to capture the perspective of the study participants. Demographic information regarding number of years in the field, grade level of students being served and experience with developing or implementing behavior plans was also collected. At the time of the interview, the researcher again reviewed the consent for participating in the study and provided an overview of the study answering any questions from the participants.

Based on the desire to gain an understanding of the experiences of the participants, data were obtained by conducting individual interviews. The interviews were semi-structured in format and consisted of open-ended questions to provide some structure for the interview but allow for flexibility in pursuing participant responses. Creswell, (2014) suggested the use of open-ended questions to elicit views and opinions from participants. The interview protocol (Appendix D) was developed using the main components of the PRIME model (Sanetti et al., 2014) to help facilitate the interview process and obtain data needed to address the research questions of the study, refer to Appendix E. The PRIME model includes three tiers: (Tier 1) Direct Training and Implementation Planning, (Tier 2) Implementation Support Strategies, and (Tier 3) Performance Feedback (Sanetti et al., 2014).

In the consent form, the researcher requested participant consent to audio record the interviews and use a transcription service to transcribe the data. The use of a transcription service allowed for an unbiased transcription of the audio data into a written format. To avoid any confidentiality breaches when using a transcription service, the researcher took several precautions such as removing any identifying information from materials, using a pseudonym in place of the participants' names and using a professional transcription service for an added sense of security and accountability. All information and data collected in connection to the current study is being stored on a password protected storage device and secured in a locked file cabinet and will remain there for a period of three years following the publication of this study.

Once the interview data were transcribed, the researcher began the process of data analysis by completing a constant comparison analysis using a priori codes from PRIME

principles (Sanetti et al., 2013a) such as problem identification, problem analysis, or intervention planning and deductive codes from behavior management literature such as function of the behavior, or teaching a replacement behavior. In addition to completing audio recordings of the semi-structured interviews, the researcher also kept a journal, which was used to capture notes during the interviews that were then later used for reflection while reviewing the interview transcriptions.

Conducting interviews with school psychologists, special education teachers and administrators allowed for the exploration of multiple avenues for drawing conclusions about the subject of FBAs and BIPs, also referred to as, triangulation. As the researcher began drawing conclusions from the data, the summaries were validated by engaging in member checks with the research participants to ensure the essence of their meaning was not lost during transcription. Additionally, using a process of interrater reliability, the researcher collaborated with a professional peer to validate themes found throughout the data.

Procedures

The procedures for data collection occurred using the following steps:

1. Using the identified eligibility criteria (Appendix A), the researcher used purposeful sampling with the support of the director to identify school psychologists, special education teachers and school administrators at MEGA to approach about participating in the research study.
2. Once the list of potential participants was identified, the director sent an e-mail (Appendix B) to each potential participant providing some information about the study, researcher contact information and instructions to contact the

researcher if they were interested in participating.

3. For participants who expressed interest in participating in the study, the researcher provided them with a copy of the consent form (Appendix C) for them to review, and if they remained interested after having reviewed the consent, set up a date and time to complete the interview.
4. At the time of the interview, the researcher reviewed the informed consent (Appendix C) with each participant prior to conducting the interview to ensure that each participant understood their role in the study, the steps in place to protect their confidentiality and the length of time that the interview information would be retained.
5. The researcher worked with each participant to identify an agreeable time and location to complete the interview, which was audio taped and typically lasted for approximately 60 minutes.
6. The researcher conducted individual interviews with each participant using the interview protocol (Appendix D) developed based on principles from the PRIME model (Sanetti et al., 2014) as outlined in Appendix E. Additionally, general information regarding the participants' training background and level of experience with behavior plans was also collected.
7. Following the interview, the researcher gave each participant a thank you note and small gift card as a token of thanks for their time and participation in the study.
8. The audio recordings from the interviews were labeled with the date and pseudonym chosen by the participant before submission for transcription.

Removing all the identifying information was an attempt to maintain the confidentiality of the study participants.

9. The audio recordings were transcribed, verbatim, by an external transcription service and then the researcher analyzed the transcribed interviews looking for common themes in the data.
10. In addition to analyzing the individual interview data, the researcher looked at the interviews collectively to identify themes that were noted across participants.

Ethics and Confidentiality Considerations

In being mindful of confidentiality, the researcher took precautions to remove any identifying information from all research materials. Audio recordings were labeled using a pseudonym in place of the participants' name and all documents and materials associated with the study are being retained in a secure file, using a password protected storage device where they will remain for a maximum of three years after the publication of this research. Once the required storage time has expired, all data associated with the study will be disposed of in a confidential manner to protect the identity of each study participant.

MEGA is an intermediate education unit that has employees who provide services to many different school districts. The researcher's current role at MEGA involves completing updated psychological testing with students who are enrolled in out of district placements such as charter schools and catholic schools. As a result of the itinerant status of the position of traveling evaluator, the researcher did not supervise or have regular contact with MEGA employed school psychologists, special education teachers, or

administrators. Since none of the potential study participants had any direct connection to the researcher's role within the organization, there was no penalty or pressure to participate. All participation was strictly voluntary.

Chapter Summary

As stated, functional behavior assessments can be viewed as a problem-solving approach to address undesired behaviors. When examining the concept of FBAs, the problem is twofold. There is a lack of consistency in the procedures for developing FBAs and BIPs resulting in poorly developed plans and there is inconsistency in supporting the implementation of these plans resulting in ineffective behavior management. The current study utilized a qualitative approach by way of semi-structured interviews to attempt to understand the process of developing functional behavior assessments and implementing behavior intervention plans from the perspectives of school psychologists, special education teachers and administrators. The study aimed to identify training approaches for assessing behavior and highlight the practices that participant's identified for effectively developing and supporting the implementation of behavior plans.

Approval was obtained from MEGA and SJFC IRB in preparing to conduct research. Using a qualitative approach, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with individual study participants in order to obtain information on the experiences of three school psychologists, three special education teachers and three school administrators with developing and implementing FBAs and BIPs. The research was conducted in an educational center in Western New York that provides supports and services to students from nine local area school districts. Data obtained from the individual interviews were transcribed and coded to identify major themes. Once the data

was summarized, member checks were completed to ensure that none of the meaning was lost during transcription. Additionally, an interrater reliability process was utilized to validate the themes identified from the data by the researcher. Chapter 4 provides a summary of the results.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

Challenging or disruptive student behavior often interferes with the delivery of instruction because teachers must stop teaching in order to address the problem behaviors (Abebe and Hailemariam, 2007). Research by Archambault et al., (2009) and Janosz et al., (2008) correlated the amount of time spent engaging in instruction with academic achievement levels and concluded that the more time a student spends in the classroom being exposed to educational material, the higher their level of academic achievement. One approach recommended for managing student behaviors in a school setting, is to conduct an assessment of the student's functional behavior and then develop a behavior intervention plan. Functional behavior assessments (FBA) and behavior intervention plans (BIP) are typically used as tools for managing problematic student behavior within the K-12 educational setting. Within the context of behavior management, the FBA and BIP process presents some challenges.

There are inconsistent procedures for developing FBAs and BIPs resulting in poorly developed plans and inconsistent support for the implementation of the plan resulting in ineffective behavior management (Couvillon et al., 2009; Roscoe et al., 2015). During her interview, Kristin (school psychologist) best summarized the problems with FBAs and BIPs saying,

The regulations regarding FBAs and BIPs come from the state education department and we (school districts) try to interpret those regulations which has

led to multiple versions of what we think an FBA should look like based on changes made at the state education department level. There have been more problems with implementing plans but less support with implementation such as who is responsible for collecting data on student behaviors which impacts data collection and the information available to evaluate the effectiveness of plans.

Tommy (school psychologist), Ann (special education teacher), Eddie (special education teacher) and James (school administrator) also commented on the problems faced when conducting FBAs and BIPs, giving support to the conclusion that there are varying levels of understanding of FBA and BIP procedures across disciplines.

The purpose of the proposed study was to gain an understanding of the necessary components for developing FBAs and BIPs and the steps for implementing BIPs from key stakeholders involved in the behavior management process. School psychologists, special education teachers and school administrators were selected as participants because of the unique perspectives they could provide based on their varying levels of involvement in the functional behavior assessment or behavior intervention plan processes. The study aimed to provide insights for school personnel and graduate training programs for school psychologists and special education teachers regarding the practices and structures needed for effective development of behavioral assessments and implementation of behavior plans. The study also aimed to identify training approaches for assessing behavior through the use of FBAs and BIPs in order to inform common training practices potentially at the graduate school or direct employment levels.

Research Questions

To better understand strategies for developing and supporting the implementation of FBAs and BIPs from the perspective of school psychologists, special education teachers and school administrators, the study examined three research questions.

1. What types of training do school psychologists and special education teachers receive to develop functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention plans?
2. What do school psychologists and special education teachers identify as effective strategies for the development and implementation of functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention plans?
3. How is the development and implementation of functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention plans supported by administration?

Participant Demographics

The current research focused on the experiences of three school psychologists, three special education teachers and three school administrators who were involved in the development and implementation of functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention plans. Individuals who worked with students age 14 or older and had experience with the process of functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention plans were invited to participate. Staff supporting students at the secondary level were chosen specifically because students in these settings are more likely to interact with more than one teacher throughout the school day leaving more potential for variation in the delivery of interventions from staff to staff. A unique pseudonym was developed for each individual participant and then attached to their audio recordings and transcripts.

Figure 4.1 includes a brief summary of the demographic information collected from each research participant.

Participant Code	Discipline	Years of Experience	Current Grade Range
Kristin (SP)	School Psychologist	33	2 nd – Transition
Sarah (SP)	School Psychologist	8	K-6 th & Secondary
Tommy (SP)	School Psychologist	5	K – Transition
Julie (SET)	Special Education Teacher	25	12 th
Eddie (SET)	Special Education Teacher	17	7 th – 12 th
Ann (SET)	Special Education Teacher	14	9 th – 12 th
James (SA)	School Administrator	35	K – 5 th & 10 th – 12 th
Crystal (SA)	School Administrator	25	Pre-K – 12 th
Bob (SA)	School Administrator	10	7 th – 12 th & Primary

Figure 4.1 Summary of Participant Demographics. Figure 4.1 illustrates the basic demographic information for each participant.

Kristin is a school psychologist with 33 years of experience in the field of education. During her career, Kristin always held the job title of school psychologist and has worked with children from grades ranging from kindergarten through transition. In her role at the time of the current study, she was supporting students from second grade through transition programs. Transition programs are specifically designed for students from ages 18-21 classified with an educational disability.

Sarah is a school psychologist with 8 years of experience in education. During her career, she worked as a school psychologist, a behavior specialist and a family therapist. Sarah supported students at the elementary level and some at the secondary level. At the time of the current study she was supporting students from grades kindergarten through sixth grade and some students at the secondary level.

Tommy is a school psychologist with 5 years of experience in the field of education. During his career, Tommy had experience as a school psychologist and a behavior specialist. Throughout his career, he supported students from grades

kindergarten through transition and in his role at the time of the current study he was supporting students ranging from kindergarten through transition.

Julie is a special education teacher with 25 years of experience in the field of education. During her career, Julie had experience working as a special education teacher in a variety of settings including: a correctional facility, a medically fragile classroom, behavior intensive special education classrooms, and therapeutic classroom settings. Throughout her career, Julie has supported students ranging from kindergarten through twelfth grades and was supporting students at the 12th grade level at the time of the study.

Eddie is a special education teacher with 17 years of experience in the field of education. During his career, Eddie had experience working as a teacher's assistant, a one-to-one aide, a student behavioral assistant and a special education teacher. Throughout his career, Eddie has supported students in Grades 6 through 12 and he continued to work with this grade range at the time of his participation in this study.

Ann is a special education teacher with 14 years of experience in the field of education. During her career, Ann had experience working as a one-to-one aid, a classroom aid and a special education teacher. During her career, Ann had experience supporting students in grades kindergarten through fourth and seventh through 12th grades and at the time of the study was supporting students ranging from ninth through 12th grades.

James is an administrator with 35 years of experience in the field of education. During his career, James had experience as a social worker supporting students in a community setting, as a social worker within a school setting, as a behavior specialist and as a school administrator. Throughout his career, he has supported students ranging from

kindergarten through 12th grade and at the time of the current study he was supporting students ranging from kindergarten through fifth and tenth through 12th grades.

Crystal is an administrator with 25 years of experience in the field of education. During her career, Crystal had experience as a social worker and case manager for approximately 20 years before becoming an administrator. Over the course of her career, Crystal supported students ranging from pre-kindergarten through 12th grade and she was also supporting this grade range at the time of the current study.

Bob is an administrator with 10 years of experience in the field of education. During his career, Bob had experience as a special education teacher, a teacher on special assignment - functioning in the role of assistant principal, and as a school administrator. Bob had experience supporting students ranging from sixth through eighth grades and at the time of the study, primarily supported students at the seventh through 12th grade levels and did some work with students at the elementary level.

Data Collection and Analysis

The study utilized a qualitative research design using a semi-structured interview approach to examine the process of developing and implementing FBAs and BIPs. To guide the interviews, the questions were developed using underlying principles from the Planning Realistic Intervention Implementation and Maintenance by Educators (PRIME) model (Sanetti et al., 2014), a theory of behavior change which specifically targets supporting the adult responsible for implementing a change plan within a school environment.

Information was gathered by completing individual in-person interviews using a digital recorder and then sent to a professional transcription service. During the

interviews, the researcher also used a journal to keep notes of any important topics or points of reflection that occurred throughout the interviews. Once the interview transcriptions were received, the researcher conducted a thorough review of the transcripts, first listening to the digital recordings, looking through the researcher journal for any key points of reflection captured during the interviews and then reading through the transcripts to identify general statements that the participants shared related to the research questions. Once identified, the statements were then grouped into categories by research question. After separating the statements into categories, the researcher used a combination of a priori coding, open coding and selective coding to reduce the data into more concise themes and eventually into specific findings related to each research question.

While analyzing the transcripts, the researcher used components from the framework of the PRIME model (Sanetti et al., 2014) to filter through the data. The PRIME model (Sanetti et al., 2014) utilizes a tiered system of supports: (Tier 1) Direct training and implementation planning, (Tier 2) Implementation support strategies, and (Tier 3) Performance feedback. Within the model there is a four-stage approach that is recommended to support implementation when preparing to make a change in behavior: (a) Problem Identification; (b) Problem Analysis; (c) Intervention Implementation; and (d) Treatment Evaluation. While deciphering the data, the researcher used the tiers associated with the PRIME model (Sanetti et al., 2014) to separate the data into categories related to each of the three guiding research questions.

Addressing Research Question 1. What types of training do school psychologists and special education teachers receive to develop functional behavior

assessments and behavior intervention plans? Of the study participants, school psychologists most often reported participating in specific training related to FBAs and BIPs during their graduate coursework. It is important to note that the two school psychologists who had less than 10 years of experience were more likely to have participated in some coursework specifically related to FBAs and BIPs during graduate school. The school psychologist who had more than 10 years of experience reported obtaining all of her knowledge of FBAs and BIPs while on the job. As explained by Kristin (SP), “when I was in grad school, there was no such thing as an FBA or BIP, all of my training on FBAs and BIPs has been acquired while on the job.” Special education teachers typically reported participating in a general course on classroom behavior management, however, the course did not focus specifically on FBAs or BIPs but rather on general classroom behavior management concepts. Across disciplines both school psychologists and special education teachers referenced “on the job experiences” as a strong basis of their learning for FBAs and BIPs.

The first research question is related to training experiences and connects to the first tier of the PRIME model, direct training and implementation planning (Sanetti et al., 2013a). Study participants spoke to their training experiences during graduate coursework and experiences obtained since working in the field of education. When exploring training, two major themes emerged: (a) training during graduate school was general or theory based and (b) training acquired through work experiences was different across disciplines. Figure 4.2 provides a summary of participant responses related to each theme.

Participant	Training during graduate school was general or theory based	Training acquired through work experiences was different across disciplines
Kristin (SP)		X
Sarah (SP)	X	X
Tommy (SP)	X	X
Julie (SET)	X	X
Eddie (SET)		X
Ann (SET)	X	X
James (SA)		X
Crystal (SA)	X	X
Bob (SA)		X

Figure 4.2 Themes for Research Question 1. Figure 4.2 is a visual representation of the participant responses to the two major themes related to research question 1.

Training during graduate school was general or theory based. During the interviews, five participants mentioned participating in general or theory based training related to behavior management during their graduate studies. Julie (SET) reported, during her graduate studies she did not participate in specific trainings on FBAs or BIPs; however, she learned about managing student behavior using token economy systems and evaluating behaviors using an antecedent-behavior-consequence (ABC) model. As Julie described, the ABC model involved looking at student behavior incidents and trying to determine what was going on before the behavior occurred, while the behavior was occurring and immediately following the behavior when brainstorming ways to intervene. Like Julie (SET)'s experience, Ann (SET) reported, during her graduate studies she participated in a course on classroom behavior management which provided her with some very basic and generalized information related to managing student behaviors and involved looked at what events happened leading up to the behavioral incident.

School psychologists Sarah (SP) and Tommy (SP) both referenced participating in direct training related to functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention plans

during their graduate work. Sarah (SP) reported engaging in specific training related to FBAs and BIPs during graduate school but described the training as very theory based with few opportunities to experience the concepts in action. Tommy (SP) described his specific training related to FBAs and BIPs as more of a presentation of general information about the concepts but did not include direct procedures or techniques for how to develop or implement FBAs or BIPs. Crystal (SA) reported completing presentations on the concepts of FBAs and BIPs during her graduate level work as an administrator, although most of the information was based on theory, there was some discussion about important steps for developing and implementing FBAs and BIPs.

Of the participants who received training during graduate school related to managing behavior, one major finding emerged. When exploring responses from school psychologists, special education teachers and school administrators, data revealed that the training experienced during graduate school was generalized and broad. Furthermore, because of the heavy emphasis on theory and less training on application, participants expressed difficulty when making the adjustment to practical application of the concepts once required to perform in work settings.

This conclusion was supported during the interview with Sarah (SP) when she reported, “in graduate school, I don’t think they went into detail but more like a brief overview of the idea of FBAs and BIPs”. During his interview, Tommy (SP) summarized this concept when he explained,

There is a major difference in what you learn in school compared to what you actually need to do in real life. In graduate school the focus was on the theory and understanding why these plans should help impact behavior but there was very

little time spent on applying that theory to procedures for developing a plan to address a student's behavior once in a school context.

Tommy (SP) and Sarah (SP) both claimed the heavy focus on theory during coursework did not provide them with a clear understanding of the procedure for developing these plans, leading them to learn the process through on the job experiences and professional development opportunities.

All three teachers described participating in a course on classroom behavior management during their graduate studies; however specific information around developing and implementing FBAs and BIPs was not directly discussed as a part of the coursework. Julie (SET) reported learning about managing student behaviors by exploring what occurred before and after the behavior with the intent of intervening before a behavior occurs. While Ann (SET) and Eddie (SET) cited on the job experiences such as team meetings as the basis for their knowledge of FBAs and BIPs. Based on the information shared by school psychologists and special education teachers the coursework in graduate school on behavior management was helpful in gaining an understanding of general management principles but not enough to help staff feel prepared to develop and implement FBAs and BIPs once performing on the job.

Tommy (SP), Kristin (SP) and Sarah (SP) all referenced performing a facilitative role when working with teams to develop FBAs and BIPs. The leadership function was echoed during interviews with participants from other disciplines. Both special education teachers and school administrators mentioned a facilitative role for school psychologists when discussing the process of developing and implementing FBAs and BIPs. Ann (SET) summarized her experience sharing,

I think what has been most helpful is when we have had one staff person who could attend the larger overall trainings and then turn key that information to everyone within our program to connect the training concepts directly to our setting. It is also more effective when it can be the same person over time functioning in this role to promote familiarity with our program and students.

During his interview, James (SA) shared about using a school psychologist to facilitate teams working to develop and implement FBAs and BIPs and commented on the increase in effectiveness he has seen with managing student behaviors once this approach was adopted. During her interview, Crystal (SA) also added support for relying on school psychologists when she shared about the referral process used to support students with behavioral difficulties.

School psychologists tended to share about having a basic understanding of general concepts related to FBAs and BIPs but not as much experience with procedures for development or implementation of the plans during graduate coursework. Special education teachers tended to share about a general understanding of basic classroom behavior management practices as a part of graduate coursework but less experience with specifically focusing on FBAs and BIPs.

Training acquired through work experiences was different across disciplines.

During the interviews, each research participant provided information regarding training through work experiences. Kristin (SP) stated, “all of my FBA and BIP training has been on the job.” Kristin (SP) further explained:

There have been multiple versions of what we think an FBA and BIP should look like based on continued changes made at the state education department level but

there is still some confusion between what an FBA and BIP are, and that they are two separate documents.

Sarah (SP) expanded on her experience with training acquired through work experience.

There has been some larger scale required trainings which involved department wide meetings to discuss FBA and BIP related procedures. However, a lot of training is self-directed in that people must choose to attend professional developments and overviews. Depending on the year, the focus of professional developments varies so some years there might be more available trainings related to FBAs and BIPs than other years.

Tommy (SP) added support for ensuring that trainings are made available to everyone stating:

Everyone needs to complete some initial training on FBAs and BIPs to help promote an overall understanding of the importance of the plans and the potential effectiveness which could help with buy-in to the process. In my experience, people seem to walk away with a better understanding of FBA and BIP concepts when the trainings are smaller in size and can allow for participants to ask specific questions about how to be effective within their setting.

The special education teachers shared about their experiences with training opportunities related to behavior management. Eddie (SET) shared:

I got training on teaming and how to bring in other people to be a part of supporting implementation but with regards to specific FBA and BIP training outside trainings are available but it really boils down to whether or not people are going to want actually attend the training. People may need direct training on how

to understand behavior plans and how to navigate resources like data tracking sheets because not everyone has a common language or understanding around behavior and using these types of plans.

Ann (SET) shared:

There have been trainings available but, not consistently. The form changes and the reasons why we complete behavior plans change frequently, making it difficult to get everyone aligned with the reason why we are doing the plans. I think it worked best when we had one person who worked with our program on a consistent basis and consulted with the team regularly. To have one person attend trainings and then turnkey the information to everyone in the program would be more effective with getting everyone on the same page.

Julie's (SET) experience was slightly different than that expressed by the other teachers. She received direct instruction from a member of the mental health department on how to complete the forms associated with FBAs and BIPs and described this as the extent of training she received related to the process of developing an FBA and BIP.

In regards to learning while on the job, administrators reported less direct involvement with attending trainings and were more likely to participate in team discussions related to managing student behavior. Each administrator mentioned the availability of trainings and professional development for their staff to attend; however, the administrators typically might only attend a portion of the training session. When describing how he supports teams James (SA) stated:

It is important for me as an administrator to model the ways I want people to manage student behavior. I do some educational types of things, but a lot of that

kind of one-on-one conversation, sometimes after the event, sometimes during or sometimes it's just me doing it and then having people watch how I handle the situation. Since most of the training is on the job, it ends up being a lot of reflection about situations after they occur. Helping staff see the connection is critical, unless you can make the process more than just paper it's difficult to get people invested in the process.

A commonality shared across disciplines was that training was acquired through work experiences. Due to the variety of training acquired through work experiences during graduate course work, the availability of on the job training became a valuable component to help school psychologists and special education teachers prepare to complete FBAs and BIPs.

Throughout the interviews, participants from each discipline spoke to the opportunities for trainings on FBAs and BIPs. Special education teachers and administrators reported relying on school psychologists to guide the process and help to support the team. Based on information from participant interviews, despite the reported availability of training at MEGA, participation in these trainings is optional and people may not choose to attend which may impact their level of understanding of the FBA and BIP processes.

Formal professional development training opportunities that are available are optional in nature rather than required, therefore not all school personnel participated in the available trainings. This finding was supported in the interview with James (SA) when he stated, "the biggest thing is we probably don't spend enough time really teaching people how to do these plans well and it leads to a less effective plan at

addressing behavior.” During her interview, Crystal (SA) also added support for ensuring all staff are trained sharing, “there needs to be some kind of professional development at the building level so we can address plans specific to the context and can fit time within the schedule to really address these plans.” Bob (SA) also added support concluding: “a lot of the trainings available are district-based and large scale talking about general procedures, there are not enough trainings that are building specific and really look at how the building and individual teams can realistically implement plans within their context (classrooms) and with their available resources.”

Overall, the data indicate that school psychologists and special education teachers generally participated in some form of coursework geared towards learning about behavior management practices during graduate school. As described by study participants, the behavior management focus during graduate school was typically on general concepts and overall theory which they felt did not fully prepare them for real life application of the concepts. School psychologists and special education teachers all reported developing their knowledge of FBAs and BIPs through work experiences such as specific professional development opportunities, learning by observing other individuals while developing and implementing these plans as well as being involved during team discussions while developing and implementing FBAs and BIPs.

Addressing Research Question 2. What do school psychologists and special education teachers identify as effective strategies for the development and implementation of functional behavior assessment and behavior intervention plans?

The second research question is related to strategies and connects to the second tier of the PRIME model, implementation support strategies (Sanetti et al., 2014). Conclusions from

participant responses resulted in four major themes: (a) staff buy-in is critical for effective implementation; (b) available resources impact plan development and implementation; (c) consistency is needed with delivery of interventions; and (d) a teaching component needs to be attached to the plan.

Participant	Necessary to include everyone involved when developing FBAs and BIPs for effective implementation	Available resources impact plan development and implementation	Consistency is needed with delivery of interventions	A teaching component needs to be attached to the plan
Kristin Psych	X	X	X	
Sarah Psych	X	X	X	
Tommy Psych	X	X	X	X
Julie Teacher	X	X	X	X
Eddie Teacher	X	X	X	X
Ann Teacher	X	X	X	
James Admin	X		X	X
Crystal Admin	X		X	X
Bob Admin	X		X	

Figure 4.3 Themes for Research Question 2. Figure 4.3 is a visual representation of the participant responses to the four major themes related to research question 2.

Include everyone when developing FBAs and BIPs. Across disciplines, school psychologists, special education teachers and school administrators commented about the significance of obtaining buy-in from staff when developing and implementing behavior plans. School psychologists emphasized the importance of including all stakeholders such as school administrators, special education teachers, classroom aides, and one-to-one aides in the process of developing and implementing FBAs and BIPs. Kristin (SP) commented about the importance of including aides from the ground up to allow them to be involved in the development process to help with their buy-in to supporting the plan. Sarah (SP) added additional support for involvement of everyone who works directly

with the student including related service staff such as speech therapists, occupational therapists and physical therapists, concluding that including these providers would allow for conversations about the student's behavior across settings and add additional strategies when developing interventions. Tommy (SP) took this concept a step further commenting on the importance of getting involvement from everyone who would be responsible for carrying out the plan to help them see the significance of the approach. Tommy (SP) stated that, "helping staff understand why they are doing what they are doing can help increase their commitment to completing the task."

Tommy (SP) highlighted the approach he uses when supporting teams during the development and implementation of FBAs and BIPs; first citing the importance of the information gathering phase, where personnel supporting the student give input regarding the students' behavior. Tommy (SP) then explained,

Starting with a clear definition of the behavior and what it looks like is so critical in being able to then develop interventions to address that behavior. Determining what the behavior in question is comes from conversations with the team supporting the student, especially those individuals working directly with the student like aides and teachers. Once everyone has agreed on exactly what the target behavior is, the next step is to begin discussions with the team to brainstorm ideas for possible interventions, being sure to obtain input for the staff working more closely with the student, like aides. After the team has created a list of possible interventions, the rest of the focus becomes on agreeing on which interventions to implement and making sure the person who will be responsible for implementation has a clear understanding of the plan.

The process outlined by Tommy (SP), is framed from the perspective of someone who would be supporting a team during the development and implementation of FBAs and BIPs. This perspective aligns with the implementation process outlined by Sanetti et al., (2014) which highlighted the need to focus on the adult responsible for implementation as a mechanism for increasing the effectiveness of behavior change.

Special education teachers referred to making sure everyone was on the same page and had access to the information, often referring specifically about classroom support staff and one-to-one aides. During the interviews, Eddie (SET) and Ann (SET) expanded on the concept of getting everyone involved, referring to the term, “staff buy-in” as a way to describe gaining support for the plan. Julie (SET), Eddie (SET) and Ann (SET) each made comments suggesting the need to make sure plans are accessible to support staff and that staff can understand the language written in the plan. Julie (SET) made several references to using team discussions to talk about student behavior and evaluate interventions to adjust how staff intervene. First Julie (SET) shared, “it’s useful to have team meetings where everyone can discuss the strategies and decide the best course of action, making sure everyone’s voice is heard.” Second Julie (SET) added, “it really is critical to build in time to meet and talk about student behaviors in order to be effective.”

During the interview with Eddie (SET), he commented on the importance of ensuring that everyone involved in managing student behaviors has access to information about the students plan. He also talked about getting input from everyone when brainstorming ideas for interventions and evaluating what is helpful and counterproductive for managing student behaviors. Eddie (SET) concluded that

discussing the plan as a team can help to get people on board with the process. Eddie (SET) also added, “it is important to make sure people are able to use the resources available or provide them training to help them understand the process.” This added component of not only making sure the information is accessible but also providing training to staff can only help to ensure the plans are more effective at managing behaviors. When there is a lack of staff buy-in, the process can feel more like a requirement rather than a useful tool, as suggested during the interview with Ann (SET) when she stated, “there needs to be team collaboration in order to see success, otherwise the plan feels like it is just a piece of paper.”

During their interviews, James (SA), Crystal (SA) and Bob (SA) all made references to the importance of staff-buy in and collaboration as essential to implementing behavior plans. James (SA) highlighted a potential outcome when lacking staff buy-in when he stated, “unless you can make the process more than just paper it is difficult to get people invested in the process.” Crystal (SA) and Bob (SA) added support to this claim in their comments about using input from everyone involved in supporting the student to come to an understanding about the potential function of a student’s behavior and developing effective intervention strategies to address the behavior.

Kristin (SP) spoke about the importance of including aides “from the ground up” to allow them to be involved in the development process and help obtain their “buy-in” with implementing the intervention. She further explained, the danger of not including aides from the start of the process is that they may not be as committed to carrying out the plan if they feel like they are being handed something that they were not a part of developing but need to be responsible for carrying out.

Sarah (SP) talked about the inclusion of multiple parties in the conversation about managing student behavior including: one-to-one aides, classroom support staff and related service staff such as speech therapists, occupational therapists and physical therapists. Extending the conversation about managing student behaviors across disciplines can help increase the likelihood that behavioral interventions will be carried out across settings. She concluded that allowing everyone to contribute to the conversation ultimately helps to promote staff buy-in to the individual plans and increases the likelihood that the intervention will be maintained over time.

During his interview, Tommy (SP) went beyond school personnel in his comments and shared the benefits of obtaining input from parents and students as plans are developed and interventions are considered. Julie (SET) also spoke to the value of including the student perspective when creating intervention strategies. Involving the student helps increase their level of investment in the plan and they are more likely to respond positively to the identified interventions.

The interviews with school administrators Crystal (SA) and Bob (SA) added support for including everyone in the process and obtaining input from all stakeholders. Crystal summarized this concept by sharing,

It is important to make sure everyone is together on the process and using input from everyone on the team to develop the most effective interventions. The same team approach also becomes critical when making sure everyone understands the importance of the designed plan and the need for collecting accurate data.

During his interview, Bob (SA) talked about using forums such as team meetings as times where staff can collaborate and contribute their thoughts around managing an

individual students' behavior. He spoke to the challenge of building in time throughout the school day to pull teams together for purposes of this type of conversation as a major barrier to the successful implementation of interventions.

Available resources impact plan development and implementation. Participants from the school psychologists and special education teacher groupings commented on the availability of resources when discussing implementation of interventions. Tommy (SP) talked about the importance of focusing on the individuals responsible for carrying out the intervention and their ability to implement the plan, "it is important to take into account staff resources or limitations when developing data tracking instruments and protocol so that staff can understand the expectations." He also shared that it is important to take into account what is feasible to do within the school environment when developing intervention strategies to ensure they are realistic and can actually be utilized by the student. Tommy (SP) explained:

Being a specialized setting, when students are referred to MEGA, very often they enter program with an FBA and BIP that were created in a different setting. This presents a challenge because there are times when recommended strategies may not be transferrable to our setting. Additionally, there are times when the student may be responding positively to the universal supports available to all students within our programs, yet because the student entered with a BIP in place the staff are still required to implement the plan and collect data which puts an added strain on staff who are already implementing multiple student plans at once.

Eddie (SET) also commented on the importance of considering resources available when implementing interventions, sharing that students at times enter the program with

behavior plans that have been developed for a different setting and the recommended intervention strategies many not be available within the new setting which can be a barrier to successful implementation of the plan.

School administrators typically made comments about staff when referring to resources for intervention implementation. James (SA) shared about the benefit of using one person to be responsible for working with teams on developing and managing FBAs and BIPs. Using this approach James (SA) suggests teams can think realistically about the availability of resources when brainstorming possible intervention strategies which leads to more successful plans. Crystal (SA) talked about using the members of the multidisciplinary team as resources to brainstorm intervention ideas or evaluate effectiveness of interventions such as discussing strategies that have been successful with students.

Consistency is needed with delivery of interventions. Across the disciplines, participants suggested that there is a need for consistency with intervention implementation and collecting data to evaluate the effectiveness of the interventions. School administrators generally made comments related to consistency with data collection whereas special education teachers most often reported concerns related to consistency with implementation of the interventions. School psychologists however tended to mention the importance of consistency with both the implementation of interventions and with data collection procedures.

From the school psychologist with the most years of experience to the school psychologist with the least number of years of experience, each participant mentioned the need for consistently implementing interventions across settings and with data collection

procedures across various raters. There were two messages throughout the school psychologists' interviews: (1) the critical nature of consistently implementing the intervention across multiple settings and (2) the critical need for collecting accurate data about the student behaviors and their response to interventions. When there is consistency with both implementation and data collection school psychologists report having seen more success with managing student behaviors through FBAs and BIPs.

Kristen (SP) spoke about barriers to consistency of implementation and data collection when she shared,

One of the biggest challenges is getting accurate data, sometimes that is due to lack of staff to collect the data other times it is due to staff competency.

Continuous staff turnover leads to less reliable data collection as substitute aides may not understand how to track the student behaviors or record the data. It is also important to look at how complicated the data collection system is compared to the confidence level of the person who will be delivering the intervention and collecting the data, typically an aide, to ensure that everything is easy to understand.

Sarah (SP) talked about consistency of implementation describing her role as a support to “get staff on board with the process and to be willing to try to implement the plan and do it with fidelity.” Tommy (SP) also spoke of his role as the facilitator during the process and supporting staff with managing student behaviors.

One way to try to gain this consistency is to continuously review the plan with staff to increase their familiarity with interventions and data collection procedures.

Kristin (SP), Sarah (SP) and Tommy (SP) referred to employing teaching practices such

as direct modeling when working with staff such as special education teachers and aides to consistently implement interventions and track student behaviors.

Kristin (SP) talked about the need for all team members to be familiar with student behavior plans and data collection procedures during implementation of the plan to maintain consistency stating: “it is critical for everyone on the team to know how the data collection is being performed for each student so if one person is out, someone else can easily step in and pick up.” Sarah (SP) talked about setting aside time to review plans on a regular basis sharing how it is important to make sure everyone understands exactly how to read the plan and the strategies to address student behavior. Tommy (SP) also talked about the importance of making sure everyone has reviewed student behavior plans to ensure interventions are implemented consistently across classroom settings.

Each of the school psychologists talked about the difficulty of obtaining accurate data across multiple settings reporting several barriers such as lack of time, high rate of turnover in staff, lack of staff buy-in for the process, and the high number of plans being difficult to effectively monitor. At the secondary level, Tommy (SP) referred to frequent changes in support staff and lack of time to work with staff to teach them the plan as a barrier to consistency with the delivery of interventions and with data collection. Kristin (SP) also commented on staff turnover as a major problem to consistent implementation of interventions and less reliable data collection. School psychologists most commonly reported using modeling and direct teaching of staff on both implementation strategies and data collection procedures to try to promote consistency with FBAs and BIPs.

While school psychologists referred to modeling and teaching staff to promote consistency with implementation, special education teachers talked about participating in

team discussions or conversations to promote consistency of implementation and data collection related to managing student behaviors. During the interview with Eddie (SET) he focused on the importance of discussing behavior plans with everyone involved and trying to plan for barriers that may arise during implementation to plan ways to address those barriers. Ann (SET) also commented about the value of using time as a team to talk about student behavior, interventions being tried and evaluate the effectiveness of those interventions. Although both Eddie (SET) and Ann (SET) each highlighted the benefit of meeting with a team to discuss student behaviors and evaluate behavior plans they each reported lack of time as a major barrier to ensuring that these meetings occur regularly.

With the larger number of plans and the high focus on helping students advance academically, special education teachers reported feeling there was not time to realistically discuss every student's plan and accurately monitor data collection to evaluate the effectiveness of the plan. However, Julie (SET) spoke about the ease of building in time to discuss student behavior with the team and attributed this to the small design of the program she is currently teaching in stating, "being a small team helps to allow for time for communicating between staff in order to be more preventative in regards to managing behaviors and evaluating what strategies work and which are not as helpful." Interestingly, each of the school administrators also acknowledged the difficulty of ensuring consistency of intervention implementation and data collection practices. Giving support to the comments shared by both school psychologists and special education teachers about barriers to consistently obtaining accurate data.

A teaching component needs to be attached to the plan. As a part of functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention plans, teaching a skill is one of the

underlying concepts. Across disciplines school psychologists, special education teachers and school administrators each referred to a level of teaching related to managing student behaviors. Tommy (SP) talked about the importance of supporting students and helping to teach them an alternative way to manage their behavior so that the next time they are in the situation they can make better decisions. Julie (SET) talked about the importance of encouraging students to reflect on their behavior and possible alternatives as one form of teaching associated with managing student behaviors to help prepare students for adulthood. During his interview, James (SA) shared, “we need to have the attitude when a student presents with a problem to consider those as opportunities for us to be able to either reteach or teach,” further adding support for the foundation of building skills while managing student behaviors.

Eddie (SET) commented about the need to teach students skills to help them ultimately be more successful at learning to manage their own behaviors, concluding “I think it is important in my work with students to be willing to go through the messiness of their situation and what’s going on with them to really have an impact and see change.” Eddie (SET) also spoke about the importance of thinking about the whole picture of the students being supported and understanding that they may have issues outside of school that are impacting their ability to be successful while at school. During her interview Crystal (SA) added support for focusing on teaching skills stating:

It is important to focus on the teaching component of plans and how the goal of doing this work is really to help the individual build a skill so they no longer engage in the problem behavior. People don’t understand that the process may take a lot of work up front but if done well, the student will learn the skills needed

so that the plan eventually becomes unnecessary. Reminding people that the whole point behind developing and implementing these plans is to teach a skill, rather than just being an additional task for staff to complete remains at the foundation of my role when supporting staff.

Overall, the interview results indicated that across disciplines school psychologists, special education teachers and school administrators believe staff buy-in and consistency with implementation of interventions is important to increase the effectiveness of managing student behaviors using FBAs and BIPs. School psychologists and special education teachers most often commented about the impact of available resources on the development and implementation of behavior plans. Of the study participants, one school psychologist, two special education teachers and two school administrators commented about the importance of including a teaching component within the behavior plan.

Addressing Research Question 3. How is the development and implementation of functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention plans supported by administration? The third research question is related to administrator support and connects to the third tier of the PRIME model, performance feedback (Sanetti et al., 2014) when considering supporting the adult during implementation. Two major themes emerged related to the role of the school administrator: (1) reported administrator involvement was different depending on participant role and (2) there is inconsistent use of behavior data to support disciplinary decisions.

Administrator involvement was different depending on participant role. Each study participant shared slightly different experiences with regards to the approach taken

by administrators within the FBA and BIP processes. School psychologists generally reported feeling supported by school administrators in their role as facilitators of the FBA and BIP process when managing student behaviors. This claim was evidenced by Kristin (SP) who shared, “I feel very supported by our administration, they understand how much our students’ behaviors interfere with their learning.” Sarah (SP) and Tommy (SP) also referred to feeling supported by administration during their interviews when they made comments about feeling as though their administrators understood the FBA and BIP process and were available for support as needed. Although each school psychologist expressed feeling supported they also reported less direct involvement from the administrators as they worked through the process of supporting teams with developing and implementing FBAs and BIPs.

During her interview, Sarah (SP) nicely summarized her experience with feedback related to the FBA and BIP process stating,

When developing and reviewing FBAs and BIPs, it’s helpful to have someone “comb through the plan” and give feedback. MEGA has provided opportunities to work with peers and review plans which I think increases the accuracy of what is developed which in turn makes it more likely that the plan will be effective at addressing student behavior.

While Tommy (SP) primarily spoke about the importance of the use of data as a means of performance evaluation or determining the effectiveness of a plan when he shared,

Tracking data over time to determine any patterns or changes in behaviors is critical to being able to modify the plan as needed to fit the needs of the student.

It's also important to analyze the data with the team involved in supporting the student to obtain their input on the success of the plan.

Interestingly enough, school administrators tended to speak about performance evaluation from more of an individual standpoint as evidenced during James' (SA) interview when he talked about having one-on-one conversations with staff about specific behavioral incidents and helping them talk through the event to explore possible alternatives for supporting the student. The more individualized performance evaluation was also referenced during Crystal's (SA) interview when she talked about looking at individual student behaviors and exploring what is going on when a behavior occurs to help staff brainstorm ways to intervene.

Both Tommy (SP) and Kristin (SP) shared in their experiences, the administrator typically stayed in contact with the team about general updates but was often less involved during the discussions around developing and implementing behavior plans or evaluating interventions. Sarah described during her experience the administrator helped to ensure teachers and aides understood the importance of accurate data collection and consistency with implementing interventions by continually communicating this message to staff.

Special education teachers described having conversations with school administrators about student behaviors. Julie (SET) shared about her experience stating, The administrator has been able to reframe situations for staff to help them think about different perspectives and how to address problem behaviors. It is helpful to have an administrator who is supportive of the process and open to having conversations or discussions about student behaviors and changes staff can make

to support students. The administrator can help us move through our frustration with the student in order to explore what realistically can be done to support the student.

Eddie (SET) spoke to the value of having a sense of trust from the school administrator that the team is capable of managing student behaviors while also being available as a support when needed. Ann (SET) made comments also supporting the involvement of the school administrator as a part of the team when discussing the student behaviors and evaluating the effectiveness of interventions. The general message from teachers ultimately was that it was helpful to have a supportive administrator who gets involved with the process of managing student behaviors by communicating about which strategies are effective.

The interviews with the school administrators resulted in similar conclusions as expressed by school psychologists and special education teachers. James (SA), Crystal (SA) and Bob (SA) each spoke of being available to support teams with managing student behaviors. Throughout each interview the school administrators each referenced evaluating interventions, referring to exploring what was happening before, during and after the behavior occurred. Using this approach the school administrators spoke of trying to help staff evaluate incidents to determine what helped during the situation and what was counterproductive to be preventative in planning ways to support students.

There is inconsistent use of behavior data to support disciplinary decisions.

Throughout the interviews, school psychologists, special education teachers and school administrators all referenced the importance of keeping accurate data on student behaviors and their responses to interventions. Additionally, participants for each

discipline referenced the difficulty of ensuring that data collection on student behaviors is being completed consistently and accurately. School psychologists generally commented about barriers related to obtaining consistent data across settings and raters, whereas special education teachers generally commented about barriers related to the volume of plans and the time for data collection. School administrators shared that concrete data were not always available so they would have to rely on subjective information from staff when making disciplinary decisions, adding support for the need for more consistency with data collection practices.

Kristin (SP) talked about working to make data collection sheets short and basic to make it easy for everyone on the team to understand how to collect the data. Kristin (SP) added support for her suggestion of making the data collection easy to understand when she stated, “it is critical for everyone on the team to know how the data collection is being performed for each student so if one person is out, someone else can easily step in and support.” She added another benefit for keeping data collection simple because the staff who are usually responsible for completing the data collection typically receive the least amount of training.

During the interview with Sarah (SP), she shared about her experience of going through the specific tracking sheets with the staff who will be completing the form to make sure they understand what they should be looking for and what to record. She also commented on the importance of directly modeling how the behavior data tracking should occur. Tommy (SP) added support for teaching staff through direct modeling as a tool for ensuring accurate data collection. He also highlighted the need to track data over time to determine any patterns or changes in behavior and using a team approach to

analyze the data and modify the plan as needed. Each of the school psychologists in the study talked about directly teaching staff how to track student behaviors and complete data tracking sheets. Modeling was the most commonly reported approach used by school psychologist to help staff learn how to implement interventions and collect behavior data.

Eddie (SET) and Ann (SET) each talked about using data to evaluate interventions and determine which strategies worked and which strategies were counterproductive. Using this approach, they talked about brainstorming ways to be more preventative as they work to address student behaviors. A major barrier noted during the interviews with both Eddie (SET) and Ann (SET) was the number of behavior plans that they were responsible for implementing. Ann (SET) reported, “the volume of plans impacts teachers’ effectiveness at implementation and plan evaluation.” Having a high number of plans, it is sometimes difficult to remember which strategies are recommended for use with each student and being able to accurately track all the behaviors that might be displayed. It then becomes difficult to obtain accurate data to use during the evaluation of student behavior plans and tracking their progress over time.

Julie (SET) reported a slightly different experience attributing the success with consistency of data collection to the smaller program design. As Julie (SET) reflected on her experience she shared:

Being a small team helps to allow for time for communicating between staff in order to be more preventative in regards to managing student behaviors. The smaller size of the program means there are less behavior plans to monitor and therefore we can really focus on consistent implementation. I have the benefit of

being able to talk to staff and get updates on what is going on with a student and then I can adjust if I know they are having a rough day.

The consistent collection of data allowed for staff to have a foundation to review student behavior and evaluate how well the plan is meeting the students' needs. Julie (SET) commented about the benefit of referring to data and being able to determine when there has been improvement in a student's behavior even at times when subjectively it may seem that the student has made little to no growth.

The overall message shared by school psychologists and special education teachers was that they felt school administrators were involved and they felt supported during the FBA and BIP process. School psychologists typically described less direct involvement from school administrators than special education teachers. As reported during interviews with Julie (SET) and Ann (SET), it was helpful to have time with the school administrator to discuss different students and talk through behavioral incidents to gain another perspective or to think more objectively about a students' progress. Kristin (SP) and Tommy (SP) described a less involved approach reporting that school administrators typically were generally aware of plans but were less likely to be directly involved during discussions where plans were being developed or evaluated. Sarah (SP) added comments about school administrator involvement that supported intervention implementation adding it was helpful when school administrators pushed the importance of accurate and consistent data collection among staff to promote the effectiveness of plans.

Summary of Results

During the interviews, there were many similarities in the statements made by school psychologists, special education teachers and school administrators. When addressing the first research question related to training, some participants reported participating in coursework during graduate school but each participant reported some level of knowledge acquired through work experiences. The descriptions of training ranged from specific professional development opportunities, learning by observing other individuals while developing and implementing behavior plans or being involved during team discussions while developing, implementing and evaluating FBAs and BIPs. Despite the range of training opportunities reported, the conclusion was that it was at the participants' discretion to seek out and attend these training opportunities.

When addressing the second research question across disciplines, four common conclusions were reached regarding strategies for use in the management of student behaviors using FBAs and BIPs: (1) the need to include all staff when developing FBAs and BIPs to promote staff buy-in and consistency with the implementation of interventions; (2) the need for consistency when delivering interventions; (3) the impact of available resources on plan development and implementation; and (4) the need for a teaching component as a part of the strategies to address the behavior. When addressing the third research question school psychologists and special education teachers reported feeling supported by school administrators. Although every participant felt supported, they each described a different level of administrator involvement with school psychologists generally reporting less direct involvement from administrators during the process than special education teachers. The participants expressed benefits to having the support of school administrators during the FBA and BIP process, concluding that it is

helpful to allocate specific time during supervision to review information and incidents related to student FBAs and BIPs.

Review of the participant interviews led to seven major findings connected to the research questions guiding this study: (1) School psychologists and special education teachers felt graduate school coursework on FBAs and BIPs did not easily transfer to real-life application once on the job; (2) Special education teachers and school administrators reported relying on school psychologists to guide the process and help to support the team during the FBA and BIP process; (3) School psychologists, special education teachers and school administrators indicated that it was necessary to include everyone involved when developing FBAs and BIPs for effective implementation; (4) School psychologists and school administrators highlighted the critical nature of consistently implementing interventions across multiple settings and collecting accurate data about student behaviors and their responses to interventions to promote effective behavior change; (5) School psychologists, special education teachers and school administrators referenced the need to incorporate building skills when developing FBAs and BIPs; (6) Staff felt it is helpful to allocate specific time during supervision to review information and incidents related to student FBAs and BIPs; and (7) when school administrators emphasized the need for consistent data collection, data were available to use when evaluating the effectiveness of interventions and making data driven decisions around student discipline. The next chapter includes a discussion of the findings and their connection to the literature. The chapter also includes information about possible implications and recommendations for future research, practice, education, and executive leadership as well as limitations of the study.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

The current study focused on the adults responsible for developing, implementing and supporting the implementation of functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention plans aimed at addressing problem student behavior. There has been research on the application of behavior change models within the field of education. Sanetti et. al., (2014) highlighted the importance of placing an emphasis on adult behavior change to ensure behavior intervention plans aimed at addressing problem student behavior are completed consistently and maintained overtime.

To better understand strategies for developing and supporting the implementation of behavior plans from the perspective of school psychologists, special education teachers and school administrators, the study examined three research questions.

1. What types of training do school psychologists and special education teachers receive to develop functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention plans?
2. What do school psychologists and special education teachers identify as effective strategies for the development and implementation of functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention plans?
3. How is the development and implementation of functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention plans supported by administration?

The purpose of the study was to gain an understanding of the development FBAs and effective steps for implementing BIPs. This information could then be used to provide insights for school personnel and graduate training programs for school psychologists and special education teachers regarding the practices and structures needed for effective development of behavioral assessments and implementation of behavior plans.

The use of functional behavior assessments (FBA) and behavior intervention plans (BIP) is one of the approaches used to manage student behaviors. In further exploring FBA and BIP processes, it is apparent that two problems arise in practice: (1) there are inconsistent procedures for developing FBAs and BIPs and (2) there is inconsistent support for the implementation of the plans resulting in ineffective behavior management (Couvillon et al., 2009; Roscoe et al., 2015). The inconsistency with procedures for plan development and implementation were represented in previous research and in the current study.

As described by Couvillon et al., (2009), the provisions of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997 specified the required use of FBAs and BIPs to address student behaviors. However, specific guidelines for the design or implementation of these plans were not included in the final regulations. Due to the lack of direct guidance within the mandate around procedures, information on how to develop and implement FBAs and BIPs began to be developed at local levels resulting in varied directions, ultimately decreasing the effectiveness of managing student behavior using these plans. The finding by Couvillon et al., (2009) is consistent with the findings of this study as participants shared about the role of school districts in interpreting educational mandates such as FBA and BIP regulations to put the mandates into practice. Participants

in Couvillon et al., (2009) also referred to lack of clarity in procedures as a barrier to the successful development and implementation of FBAs and BIPs.

After conducting the research there are several practices and structures identified that need to be in place to promote the effective development of behavior assessments and implementation of behavior plans. Within the implications and findings section, the suggested practices and structures will be outlined based on the results of this study. The chapter addresses limitations of the study, implications of the findings concluded from the results, as well as recommendations for future research, practice, education, and executive leadership.

Implications of Findings

The Planning Realistic Intervention Implementation and Maintenance by Educators (PRIME) developed by Sanetti et al., (2014) is an adult behavior change theory that focuses on training the adult responsible for implementation as a means of improving the implementers effectiveness at addressing undesired student behaviors by maintaining consistency with implementation of interventions. Using the PRIME model (Sanetti et al., 2014) as the framework, the current study sought the perspectives of school psychologists, special education teachers and school administrators for examining the development and implementation of FBAs and BIPs. The PRIME model is an approach designed to focus on the adult responsible for implementation as a method of promoting more consistency with behavior intervention plans, which can eventually lead to ongoing change (Sanetti et al., 2014).

The PRIME model (Sanetti et al., 2014) uses a tiered system of supports including: Tier 1: Direct training and implementation, Tier 2: Implementation support

strategies and Tier 3: Performance feedback. The tiers are designed to promote implementation of evidenced-based interventions by supporting the adult responsible for implementation. The guiding tiers of the PRIME model (Sanetti et al., 2014) were used during the current study when categorizing participant responses and determining recommendations.

Analysis of participant interviews led to seven major findings. The first finding was that school psychologists and special education teachers felt graduate school coursework on FBAs and BIPs did not easily transfer to real-life application once on the job. The second finding was that special education teachers and school administrators reported relying on school psychologists to guide the process and help to support the team during the FBA and BIP process. The third finding was that school psychologists, special education teachers and school administrators all indicated that it was necessary to include everyone involved when developing FBAs and BIPs for effective implementation. The fourth finding was that school psychologists and school administrators highlighted the critical nature of consistently implementing interventions across multiple settings and collecting accurate data about student behaviors and their responses to interventions to promote effective behavior change.

The fifth finding was that school psychologist, special education teachers, and school administrators referenced the need to incorporate teaching skills when developing FBAs and BIPs. The sixth finding was that staff felt it helpful to allocate specific time during supervision to review information and incidents related to student FBAs and BIPs. Finally, the seventh finding was when school administrators emphasized the need for consistent data collection, data were available to use when evaluating effectiveness of

interventions and making data driven decisions around student discipline. The results of this study add to the growing literature around functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention plans.

Graduate school training did not easily transfer to real-life application. School psychologists and special education teachers felt graduate school coursework on FBAs and BIPs did not easily transfer to real-life application once on the job. During interviews, school psychologists and special education teachers shared their graduate school experiences, typically describing them as broad overviews of behavior management concepts. When FBAs and BIPs were specifically discussed in graduate school, the focus was on theoretical concepts rather than application. The underlying theory is helpful for providing a foundation behind the purpose of these plans. However, more direct training on steps for development and implementation is needed for successful application. Based on claims from study participants of varying levels of experience, more direct training in graduate school is needed around procedures for developing FBAs and BIPs.

Even though school psychologists reported more familiarity with the theory behind FBAs and BIPs than special education teachers, both disciplines referred to learning actual procedures for development and implementation once on the job. The variety in procedures stems from varied interpretations of educational law by school districts. The variety of practices and interpretations is consistent with previous studies (Couvillon et al., 2009; Roscoe et al., 2015) where findings in the literature determined that loosely defined FBA and BIP completion guidelines led to multiple approaches for development and implementation. In their study, Couvillon et al., (2009) talked about the

lack of guidance to implement FBAs and BIPs within state regulations which led to multiple interpretations of the law resulting in a variety of procedures.

With multiple interpretations of the mandate, lack of clarity around specific procedures was also evident in graduate school training programs as evidenced by the variety of training experiences reported by both school psychologists and special education teachers during the current study. This conclusion supports previous research by Oliver et al., (2015) when they discussed the growth in focus of graduate training programs on behavior-analytic practices including function based assessments and the variety of training approaches used by training programs.

As explained by school psychologists in the current study, having a general understanding of the theory behind why FBAs and BIPs are completed was helpful. However, they felt a breakdown in preparedness and wished for specific guidance in steps for development and implementation when expected to lead teams in the process. Participants expressed a lack of direct training in procedures for developing and implementing FBAs and BIPs during graduate school. The lack of training impacted preparedness to perform once on the job. This finding contradicted previous literature by Oliver et al., (2015) who explored the types of training received by staff supporting student behaviors. Oliver et al., (2015) specifically sought input from behavior analysts certified by the Behavior Analysis Certification Board and determined the study participants who were practicing educators reported emphasizing functional analysis when teaching FBA methods during their courses. Using a combination of peer reviewed articles, video examples and in vivo exercises, students reportedly engaged in a variety of training approaches during graduate school when learning FBA methods, as suggested by

Oliver et al., (2015). Although school psychologists in the current study participated in coursework on FBAs and BIPs, their experiences differed from the participants in the study by Oliver et al., (2015).

Despite the reported practice in the literature of teaching FBA methods during graduate school, participants in the current study did not report the same experience. Conversely, study participants all referenced on the job training experiences when discussing their training backgrounds in developing and implementing FBAs and BIPs; while Oliver et al., (2015) and Roscoe et al., (2015) each referenced training experiences during graduate work. Despite this difference, results of this study are similar to previous research (Oliver et al., 2015; Roscoe et al., 2015) indicating a continued benefit from participating in ongoing training opportunities related to developing and implementing FBAs and BIPs. In their study, Connors et al., (2015) explored evidence based assessment practices in schools and concluded that some clinicians reported a desire for continuing education opportunities. The Connors et al., (2015) finding is consistent with the findings of this study as participants across disciplines referenced the need for ongoing training. School psychologists in the current study reported a heavy reliance on training experiences during employment when learning practical ways to develop and implement FBAs and BIPs.

School psychologists guide the process. Special education teachers and school administrators reported relying on school psychologists to guide the process and help to support the team during the FBA and BIP process. As summarized in the results of this study, special education teachers and school administrators looked to school psychologists to facilitate the process of developing FBAs and BIPs and supporting the

implementation of these plans. Since school psychologists are viewed in a leadership role it becomes critical that they are comfortable with guiding the process. The sense of comfortability comes with increased levels of preparedness for developing FBAs and BIPs and supporting their implementation. As school psychologists receive training, they can in turn work directly with teams to share that information with the staff that will be supporting the student directly. These findings are consistent with previous research that after receiving training on FBA and BIP development, staff are more likely to clearly define the target behavior and develop more accurate interventions (VanAcker et al., 2005).

School psychologists generally felt supported by school administrators in their role as facilitators of the FBA and BIP process when managing student behaviors, reporting more independence during the plan development phases. Kristin (SP), Sarah (SP) and Tommy (SP) all described themselves in a teaching role when supporting adults who would be responsible for the intervention implementation. Each school psychologist spoke to helping to teach other staff during the process, commenting about modeling how to complete data tracking by sitting with staff and training them on exactly what to look for and how to intervene when addressing student behaviors. These findings are consistent with Klein et al., (2006) when they identified five broad leader functions as: “(a) structuring and directing; (b) intervening actively; (c) monitoring; (d) motivating and inspiring; and (e) teaching, coaching and training.” The strategies reported by school psychologists also aligned with the suggestions made by Sanetti et al., (2014) in relation to the first tier of the PRIME model around direct training and implementation planning.

Building off the first finding around preparation during graduate coursework, it becomes even more essential for school psychologists to feel prepared to lead and support teams during the development and implementation of FBAs and BIPs based on special education teachers and school administrators reported reliance on school psychologists to lead the process. Based on the conclusions reached by participants during the current study, when the person facilitating the process is more prepared, the team is more likely to develop and implement FBAs and BIPs that can effectively address student behaviors.

Include input from various sources. School psychologists, special education teachers and school administrators all indicated that it was necessary to include everyone involved when developing FBAs and BIPs for effective implementation. A common message throughout the participant interviews was the need to ensure that everyone who would be supporting the student is involved throughout the process of developing and implementing FBAs and BIPs. The idea of “including everyone” was described as getting input from all team members when gathering information about student behaviors, developing plans, brainstorming possible interventions and then evaluating the students’ response to those interventions. When describing team members, participants referenced school psychologists, special education teachers, aides and therapists involved with supporting the student. Connors et al., (2015) referenced the concept of staff buy-in as a method of getting input from everyone, concluding that getting buy-in from everyone helps to ensure that people understand why they are doing what they are doing.

The collaborative approach and inclusion of input from all stakeholders echoes the conclusion discovered by Scott et al., (2004) who explained how schools are

encouraged to use team approaches as they evaluate student behaviors and begin to make judgments about the functions or causes guiding student behaviors. VanAcker et al., (2005) also explored the benefits of a team approach when developing behavior plans, concluding the use of teams leads to more thorough behavior plans that include multiple perspectives. The literature on managing student behaviors and the interviews from the current study all support the conclusion that effective behavior plans require input from everyone involved from development to implementation.

Consistency is critical. School psychologists and school administrators highlighted the critical nature of consistently implementing interventions across multiple settings and collecting accurate data about student behaviors and their responses to interventions to promote effective behavior change. The need for consistency was a concept that was brought up frequently throughout the interviews with school psychologist and school administrators. School psychologists discussed the need to consistently deliver interventions over time and across multiple settings. School administrators spoke to the need to collect accurate data in order to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions at addressing problem student behaviors. Their comments connected to the first tier of the PRIME model (Sanetti et al., 2014) related to direct training and implementation planning when supporting staff during intervention implementation. Implementation planning refers to the steps a person takes when planning to initiate an intervention. The results of the current study support the perception that interventions are more effective when staff plan ways to ensure that implementation will continue despite potential barriers.

As explained by Sanetti et al., (2014) the direct training and implementation planning component involves developing an action plan which includes steps for implementing interventions and plans for addressing potential barriers to maintain implementation over time. Dedicating time to this phase helps lay the groundwork for successful implementation of interventions and increases the likelihood that implementation will continue over time. As concluded in the results of this study, school psychologists reported seeing more success in managing student behavior when time is dedicated up front to supporting staff with initially preparing to implement an intervention.

These findings are similar to those discovered by Clark and Bassett, (2014) and Wilson et al., (2016) when they concluded that planning increased the likelihood that an individual would maintain an implementation over time. The school psychologists' finding also supports the work by Sanetti et al., (2015) when they explored implementation issues within educational settings using implementation planning as a basis for increasing the effectiveness of interventions and maintaining interventions over time and concluded that student outcomes improved as teachers consistently adhered to interventions.

Participant comments related to the importance of consistently implementing interventions and collecting data correlated with the previous findings around the importance of treatment fidelity. Lakin and Shannon, (2015) explored implementation fidelity when examining why evidenced based interventions were not producing anticipated results. Based on their findings, Lakin and Shannon, (2015) concluded that variation in how an intervention was being implemented can often explain differences in

treatment effectiveness. Results of the current study supported this finding as participants reported the need to ensure multiple people were training on intervention implementation and data collection procedures to facilitate congruency in supporting the student despite which staff is available to support the student. Using this approach, participants found behavior data were being collected more consistently and teams were reporting more success in managing student behaviors, aligning with the findings of the Lakin and Shannon study (2015).

Include a teaching component within FBAs and BIPs. School psychologists, special education teachers, and school administrators referenced the need to incorporate building skills when developing FBAs and BIPs. The premise of teaching is designed to be a part of the underlying concepts of an FBA so it is logical that participants in the current study would speak to building students skills as a component of student behavior plans. The ultimate goal of educators is to teach; therefore, it is essential that there is a teaching component attached to the student behavior plan. Preparing children for adulthood by helping them learn skills is at the core of every educational setting. Similar to conclusions made by Ingram et al., (2005), as referenced during the results, participant responses in the current study supported the conclusion of teaching a skill while managing student behaviors.

Include discussion of FBAs and BIPs during supervision. Staff felt it was helpful to allocate specific time during supervision discussing student FBAs and BIPs to review specific behavioral incidents and evaluate interventions. Results from special education teacher interviews indicated that teachers found value in being able to specifically discuss behavioral incidents with school administrators and evaluate the

effectiveness of interventions. Stetler et al., (2014) described these more informal education opportunities as purposeful interactions related to direct training on managing student behaviors. Special education teachers talked about using time when meeting with individual supervisors to discuss individual student behavior incidents and brainstorm preventative actions to address the incident in the future. The findings support the perception that dedicating time during supervision to discuss evidenced based practices can help support the implementation of evidenced based practices. The idea of evaluating student responses to interventions and planning for ways to ensure implementation as the plan was designed gives support for the concept of planning ways to maintain intervention implementation over time. The findings by Connors et al., (2015) supported the concept of using time during supervision to plan strategies for maintaining interventions and dealing with potential barriers. This level of planning connects directly to the PRIME model (Sanetti et al., 2014) regarding planning for barriers to implementation.

The second tier of the PRIME model (Sanetti et al., 2014) refers to implementation support strategies which can be connected to planning for ways to continue intervention implementation over time. Comments by school psychologists in the current study echoed the findings in the literature around the impact of planning for ways to address potential barriers during intervention implementation (Ghisi et al., 2015; Sanetti et al., 2013a; & Sanetti et al., 2015). Kristin (SP) talked about being available to support staff by answering questions and brainstorming ideas with them related to implementing interventions, while Tommy (SP) talked about having realistic conversations with team members about how they would support the student throughout

the school day. In their experience, using these approaches both Kristin (SP) and Tommy (SP) reported seeing more success with managing student behaviors.

Administrator influence on data collection. When school administrators emphasize the need for consistent data collection, data was available to use when evaluating the effectiveness of interventions and making data driven decisions around student discipline. School psychologists referenced relying on support from school administrators to help staff understand the need for behavioral data. The final tier of the PRIME model (Sanetti et al., 2014) is about performance feedback and can be connected to comments shared by participants about discussing what was helpful and what was counterproductive as a means of evaluating the implementation of interventions. Connors et al., (2015) gave support for using time during supervision specifically to process managing student behaviors. This idea was echoed during interviews with special education teachers who shared about the value in meeting with supervisors to discuss behavioral incidents and discuss ways to not only make sure interventions are delivered but also to evaluate student responses to those interventions.

Ghisi et al., (2015) reported on the importance of maintaining consistency over time and the impact that consistent implementation can have on effectively delivering behavioral interventions. Sanetti et al., (2015) added support for the benefits of consistently maintaining interventions as a key for successfully impacting behaviors. Ultimately the importance of consistently implementing interventions across multiple settings and collecting accurate data about student behaviors and their responses to interventions to promote effective behavior change was evident during participant responses in the current study as well as in the literature.

Limitations

There are two limitations related to this research study. The first limitation was the small sample size of nine participants, three from each of the three disciplines: school psychologists, special education teachers and school administrators. The second limitation was the context in which the study was conducted. MEGA is an intermediate education unit that provides services to many different school districts. This means that, for the context of the study, most professional employees were trained in special education, which is typically not the case in traditional school settings. Despite the level of expertise in special education, each study participant spoke to the challenges of completing FBAs and BIPs.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, there are several recommendations. The recommendations are specifically geared towards: (1) future research; (2) graduate training programs for school psychologists and special education teachers; and (3) school personnel.

Recommendations for future research. As determined within the literature and supported within the conclusions of this study, there are inconsistent procedures for developing FBAs and BIPs resulting in poorly developed plans and inconsistent support for implementation resulting in ineffective behavior management (Couvillon et al., 2009). Based on this determination it might be helpful to gain an understanding of what are the basic components of an FBA and BIP that lead to change in a student's behavior, with the intention of providing more guidance around specific procedures which can ultimately lead to more consistency within the process. Using this information, future researchers

might be able to develop some consistent procedures and guiding training approaches which could be adopted at the graduate school and employment levels.

Due to the small sample size, future researchers may want to replicate this study increasing the sample size. Additionally, since all the participants were employed by MEGA, a cooperative educational exchange specializing in providing special education services, future researchers should consider replicating the study in a traditional school district setting. Since a traditional school district setting is comprised of both general education and special education staff, it might be interesting to see if there is a reported difference in training approaches experienced during graduate school by staff from each background. Replicating the study in a traditional school district setting might also allow for an increased number of participants since traditional school district settings are often larger than a cooperative educational exchange like MEGA.

The current study focused on the training experiences of school psychologists and special education teachers related to FBAs and BIPs. However, results revealed that classroom aides and one-to-one aides are also often involved within the development and implementation process. Based on multiple comments regarding involving classroom aides and one-to-one aides in the development and implementation of FBAs and BIPs, future research might consider exploring the level of understanding aides have of the FBA and BIP process. Becoming aware of what aides know about the process can lead to strategies and supports to help aides gain skills to become more knowledgeable about the FBA and BIP process, ultimately increasing effectiveness at managing student behaviors. It might also be helpful to explore the level of understanding of other providers who

might be supporting a student in the FBA or BIP process such as, speech therapists, physical therapist or occupational therapists.

The PRIME model (Sanetti et al., 2013a) highlights the need to focus on supporting intervention implementation by supporting the adult responsible for delivering the intervention. Future research may want to explore the effectiveness of behavior plans at improving student behavior outcomes when strategies are built in to promote supporting the adult responsible for implementing the intervention. Determining if there is a correlation between supporting the adult during implementation and improving student behavioral outcomes can add support for the conclusions determined in the findings by Sanetti et al., (2013a) around improving student outcomes.

Recommendations for graduate training programs for school psychologists and special education teachers. Based on the study's findings, it would be beneficial for graduate school training programs to provide specific guidance for school psychologists and special education teachers about how to move from the theory behind FBAs and BIPs to the application of those concepts once in work settings. Pairing the understanding of the theoretical framework guiding the process of FBAs and BIPs with the strategies for putting those practices into action helps increase the level of preparedness of school psychologists and special education teachers at developing and implementing these plans. This conclusion adds support for expanding graduate coursework to include information around procedures for developing and implementing FBAs and BIPs when teaching about the foundational and theoretical concepts that guide these plans.

Additionally, to bridge the gap between theory and practical application, it is recommended that graduate school programs include opportunities for school

psychologists and special education teachers to participate in clinical experiences related to supporting the development and implementation of a student behavior plan. One method for facilitating the clinical experiences is for graduate programs to create partnerships with area educational providers such as traditional school districts and also charter schools where graduate students can have the opportunity to participate in the FBA and BIP process in a real-world setting. With the added component of the practical experience during graduate school, it is more likely that school psychologist and special education teachers will feel better prepared to engage in the FBA and BIP process when required to do so as a part of their job responsibilities.

Recommendations for school personnel. Completing interventions in the high school setting continues to present a number of challenges, making this an area that could benefit from further exploration. As described in the study by Bruhn et al., (2015) the landscape of high school requiring students to navigate multiple classrooms and interact with multiple teachers adds another layer of complexity in the consistent delivery of interventions. Considering supporting the development and implementation of FBAs and BIPs at the secondary level, findings from the study resulted in three recommendations for school based personnel.

The first recommendation is for districts and employers to provide required ongoing building-level training for all school personnel involved in developing and implementing FBAs and BIPs. The second recommendation is for districts and employers to identify one person at the program or building level to consistently facilitate the FBA and BIP process and guide the team to help increase their understanding and confidence with intervention implementation. Finally, the third recommendation refers to useful

steps to improve student behavioral outcomes based on previous research. The suggested recommendations are designed to promote more consistency regarding development and implementation of FBA and BIP within school settings.

Building level training. One criticism found in the results of this study was that trainings on FBAs and BIPs were provided on a large scale including individuals throughout the organization. Staff felt the large-scale nature of the training limited the ability to tailor the training to their individual settings. Since the information was provided on more of a global scale, there was not room for discussion of specific situations around individual students or settings. Conducting trainings on a smaller scale, at the building or team level, can help solidify the skills for staff and give them a sense of walking away from the training with knowledge they can immediately begin putting into practice. This smaller training group approach can also promote more consistency with delivery of interventions amongst teams as everyone is receiving the same foundational knowledge around supporting the student, establishing congruency between settings.

In attempting to increase the consistency of the implementation of plans, it is important to have all school personnel who interact with students informed about the practices and procedures related to students' behavior plans. School personnel who would typically support the student might include: school psychologists, social workers, school administrators, classroom teachers, classroom aides, and one-to-one aides. Since educational training backgrounds are different for each discipline it can be assumed that not everyone will have the same level of understanding related to FBAs and BIPs.

It is recommended that school districts provide ongoing training opportunities for all school personnel involved in developing and implementing FBAs and BIPs in order to

increase staff's overall effectiveness at managing behaviors. It is also critically important to ensure that these training opportunities are required for all school personnel involved in supporting the student. As echoed throughout the results of this study, when trainings are optional staff members who may benefit from the information may not attend, further decreasing their level of effectiveness at successfully implementing interventions and tracking data associated with behavior plans.

Designated liaison. The next recommendation is to designate a person to be responsible for facilitating the FBA and BIP process. This individual would provide training for team members on both theoretical and practical applications as well as help support the team during implementation to ensure everyone understands the process. As teachers, Julie (SET) and Ann (SET) spoke positively about their experiences with having one individual they could rely on for support with managing the FBA and BIP process and evaluating plans to support student needs. School administrators, James (SA) and Crystal (SA) also shared positive experiences with relying on one individual to lead the team and assist with training staff on intervention implementation and data collection procedures.

Incorporating the practice of using a designated liaison during the FBA and BIP processes could have some positive effects, the first being, consistency. Using a designated liaison can help ensure that everyone on the team is hearing the same message in regards to training and preparation for developing and implementing FBAs and BIPs. By having one person responsible for training staff and supporting the process another benefit is that individual can function in the role of facilitator and be looked to as the expert to assist teams throughout the process. All team members will hear the same

message and learn how to consistently implement interventions which can in turn increase the effectiveness of staff at managing student behaviors.

Steps to improve student behavioral outcomes. The third and final recommendation for school personnel refers to suggested steps aimed at improving student behavioral outcomes using FBAs and BIPs. As outlined during Chapter 2, there are several steps recommended to improve the effectiveness of behavior plans at addressing student behavior outcomes. These steps can be summarized into four categories: (a) obtaining input from key personnel throughout the FBA and BIP process, (b) using descriptive FBA information and strength based strategies when developing interventions, (c) expanding the administrator role in the management of resources related to the FBA and BIP process, and (d) building in accommodations to focus on supporting the adult responsible for implementation as outlined in the PRIME model by Sanetti et al., (2014).

As suggested, it is necessary to include all stakeholders responsible for managing student behavior throughout the process of plan development and implementation to increase consistency with implementation and data collection and to overall improve plan effectiveness. Expanding teams to include staff from multiple disciplines allows for individuals with various backgrounds to contribute their knowledge. This can increase the likelihood that the final student plan will be more comprehensive and include strategies to support the student from multiple viewpoints. Adding the input from individuals from multiple disciplines can not only help with developing more comprehensive targeted interventions but also with improving the consistency with the delivery of those interventions across various contexts, such as the classroom or therapy settings. At the

secondary level when students are more likely to interact with multiple teachers during the course of the school day as they change from class to class, involving multiple disciplines can also be helpful when brainstorming potential implementation strategies that can be implemented throughout the school environment.

Using descriptive information obtained from completing an FBA can lead to more effective intervention strategies that will positively impact student behavior outcomes. As suggested by March and Horner, (2002): (a) interventions developed using information obtained from FBAs were more successful at reducing problem student behavior, (b) using this approach can be useful with improving student social behaviors, and (c) using descriptive assessment procedures during the FBA can contribute to the development of effective function based interventions. Following this approach, it is likely that plans will be more successful at improving student behavior outcomes. In middle or high school settings where students transition from class to class throughout the school day, obtaining descriptive information from everyone who interacts with the student can help teams create a more comprehensive overview of the student's behavior over the course of the entire day. This information can be especially helpful as teams assess the function of a student's behavior and brainstorm intervention strategies.

The use of strength based strategies when developing interventions was not specifically referred to by participants in this study, but was highlighted by Cox, (2006) as beneficial when trying to address problem behaviors. However, the lack of direct reference to strength based strategies in the results does not mean that participants did not value their use. Participant responses around teaching students skills and preparing them for adulthood supported the concepts of building strengths as defined in the literature by

Cox, (2008). Building from student strengths can help teams focus on the foundational teaching component when developing and implementing interventions. As summarized by Bruhn et al., (2015) students at the secondary level are at a developmental period where there is typically a decline in academic motivation and school-related behaviors. By focusing on building upon student strengths, staff can help to enhance motivation in adolescents and increase self-confidence, thereby decreasing the frequency of undesired or problem behaviors, as supported in the research by Cox, (2008).

Expanding the role of the school administrator in the management of resources related to FBAs and BIPs can allow for more opportunities to support teams in the process. The management of resources can include managing schedules to allow teams time to discuss student behavior plans, providing training for staff to increase understanding of the procedures, emphasizing the use of data when evaluating student behavior plans, and allocating time during supervision to discuss FBA and BIP related information. As suggested in the results, when school administrators assumed a more involved role during the plan evaluation process, special education teachers felt more supported in their efforts towards managing student behaviors using FBAs and BIPs. This conclusion supports the findings by Aasekjaer et al., (2016) that implementation of evidenced based practices is more successful when leaders provide support for staff such as providing resources to take the process further, balancing time allocation, and structuring the project (Aasekjaer et al., 2016).

Newman, Guiney, and Silva, (2017) also looked at the role of the supervisor and examined the impact of using strength-based supervision (SBS) approaches to support employees. SBS is defined as “a process in which supervisors and supervisees

collaboratively assess and build upon supervisee strengths and in which supervisee contributions to supervision are valued” (Newman et al., 2017, p. 22). Using SBS practices can help promote growth in the supervisee and ultimately lead to better outcomes in their job performance (Newman et al., 2017).

Involvement and guidance from leadership is critical when attempting to truly impact student behaviors. As supported during the results of this study, when leaders place an emphasis on obtaining accurate data around student behaviors and then in turn encourage the use of the data to evaluate the effectiveness of plans, better student outcomes are achieved. As concluded by Cawelti, (2001) when supporting implementation leaders should: (a) establish teams to monitor data and plan for improvements, (b) provide staff development time to analyze whether local and state procedures are aligned, and (c) ensure there is a form of ongoing evaluation.

Additionally, when school administrators place an emphasis on data collection it can lead to more consistent data collection on student behaviors. This information can in turn be used during decision making, and can help promote a common language and sense of understanding related to FBAs and BIPs.

By building in accommodations to focus on supporting the adult responsible for implementation as outlined in the PRIME model by Sanetti et al., (2014), research suggests that interventions are maintained over time, building consistency, and ultimately better outcomes are achieved. The PRIME model (Sanetti et al., 2014) is a behavior change model designed to support the adult responsible during the implementation process. Figure 5.1 provides a summary of the study findings and the connections to each of the tiers outlined in the PRIME model (Sanetti et al., 2014).

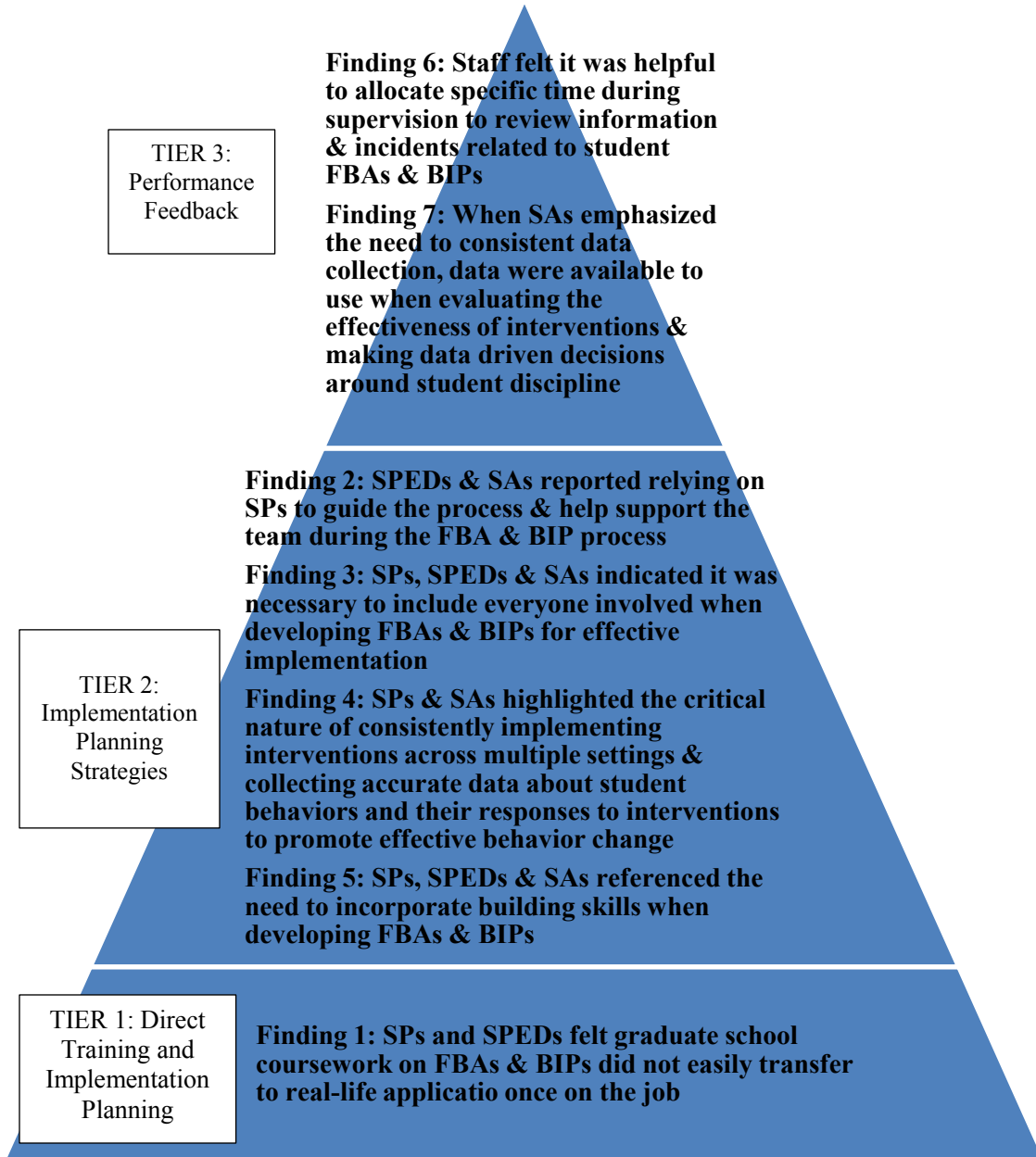


Figure 5.1 Findings matched to PRIME (Sanetti et al., 2014). Provides a summary of the findings of the study matched with each of the tiers outlined in the PRIME model developed by Sanetti et al., (2014).

As explained, the first tier of the PRIME model (Sanetti et al., 2014) focuses on direct training and implementation planning. Direct training aims to help increase the implementer’s preparation for and confidence regarding implementation; while

implementation planning aims to increase preparedness for implementation (Sanetti et al., 2014). Based on the results of this study, there is a reported benefit in participating in direct training regarding FBA and BIP procedures. There is also more success noted when individuals plan potential interventions for use with students. It is recommended that schools provide training opportunities to help staff become familiarized with the FBA and BIP process and steps for developing and implementing plans. Using a designated liaison, this individual can provide training for staff and support teams during discussions to brainstorm and evaluate behavioral interventions.

The second tier of the PRIME model (Sanetti et al., 2014) is the implementation support strategies phase. At this level the individual focuses on identifying potential barriers to implementation and planning ways to address the potential barriers. It is recommended that teams include time during the discussion around developing FBAs and BIPs to focus on identifying potential barriers to implementation with the goal of developing planned responses should those barriers occur. A designated liaison might be helpful at this stage to help facilitate the conversation around ways to address potential implementation barriers.

The third and final tier of the PRIME model (Sanetti et al., 2014) focuses on performance feedback and indicates the importance of incorporating a way to evaluate how the adult is doing during the process of delivering the intervention. This is another area where a designated liaison could assist. The final tier involves discussing treatment integrity and progress monitoring as a mechanism for evaluating the effectiveness of the interventions at addressing student behaviors. The liaison could serve to guide teams during this process by discussing challenges to implementation and brainstorming ways

to maintain implementation of the intervention. The availability of accurate data becomes critical at this stage as the data can be reviewed and used to evaluate the effectiveness of the student behavior plan.

Conclusion

Within the academic setting, as cited by Abebe and Hailemariam, students at times demonstrate challenging and disruptive behaviors which can interfere with their ability to function (2007). There are times when student behaviors can become disruptive to the learning environment or can threaten the safety of others, either case, requiring school personnel to dedicate energy towards addressing the problem behavior (Anderson et al., 2015). Ongoing behavior problems are likely to result in a pattern of discipline referrals, removal from class and suspensions. In either scenario, the increased time outside of the classroom generally leads to missed instructional opportunities and can indirectly impact academic achievement (Janosz et al., 2008; Stephan et al., 2013). The strain of managing challenging behaviors can be even more evident in a middle or high school settings where students change classes and interact with different teachers and peers throughout the school day.

Functional behavior assessments (FBA) and behavior intervention plans (BIP) are typically used as tools for managing problematic student behavior within the K-12 educational setting. FBAs and BIPs became a required component when managing student behavior following the passing of The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997 (NYSED, 2013b), which essentially required school personal to use these specific approaches when addressing problem behavior in students who are classified with an educational disability. Although the Act established the requirement to use the

FBA and BIP process there was limited information around the specific procedures for completing these processes leading school districts to develop individual approaches for developing and implementing these plans, ultimately resulting in ineffective behavior management practices.

The purpose of the study was to gain an understanding of the necessary components for developing FBAs and effective steps for implementing BIPs from key stakeholders involved in the behavior management process. The study aimed to provide insights for school personnel, school administrators and policy makers regarding the practices and structures that need to be in place for effective development of behavioral assessments and implementation of behavior plans. In attempting to understand strategies for developing and supporting the implementation of FBAs and BIPs from the perspective of school psychologists, special education teachers, and school administrators the current study focused on strategies and training techniques reported by study participants.

When considering practices and structures needed for effective development of behavior assessments and implementation of behavior plans a variety of practices and structures need to be in place, particularly for those developmental years where students exhibit more complex behavioral issues. As explained throughout the chapter, participants referenced the need for ongoing training opportunities in developing and implementing FBAs and BIPs. Additionally, specific strategies were suggested such as: obtaining input from key personnel, consistently implementing interventions over time and allocating specific time to discuss FBA and BIP related issues during supervision.

Sanetti et al., (2014) looked at ways to support the implementation of an intervention and suggested focusing on the adult who would be responsible for the implementation of the intervention through the adoption of the PRIME model. Using this approach, classroom teachers can develop a plan for consistently delivering the behavioral intervention and a plan for maintaining that consistency despite possible barriers that may arise over time (Ghisi et al., 2015). Consistent adherence to the behavior plan would likely elicit behavior change and effectively address problem student behavior (Sanetti et al., 2013a). By focusing on supporting the adult responsible for implementation of the behavior plan, Sanetti et al., (2014) suggested that behavior change is more likely to occur. This study provided an opportunity to connect the PRIME model (Sanetti et al., 2014) to an educational environment to explore the approach of supporting the implementer during implementation of interventions as a means of increasing effectiveness.

The current study utilized a qualitative approach to attempt to understand the process of developing functional behavior assessments and implementing behavior intervention plans from the perspectives of school psychologists, special education teachers and administrators. In preparing to conduct research, approval was sought from SJFC IRB and MEGA. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with individual study participants to obtain information on the experiences of three school psychologists, three special education teachers and three school administrators with developing and implementing FBAs and BIPs. The research was conducted using participants from an educational center in Western New York that provides supports and services to students from nine local area school districts.

During the interviews, there were many similarities in the statements made by school psychologists, special education teachers and school administrators. In relation to training each participant reported some level of knowledge acquired through work experiences. The descriptions of training ranged from specific professional development opportunities, learning by observing other individuals while developing and implementing behavior plans or being involved during team discussions while developing, implementing and evaluating FBAs and BIPs. Despite the range of training opportunities reported, the resounding conclusion was that it was at the participants' discretion to seek and attend these training opportunities.

Across disciplines, the need for staff buy-in and consistency with the implementation of interventions was continuously referenced when discussing strategies to increase the effectiveness of managing student behaviors using FBAs and BIPs. The impact of available resources on plan development and implementation as well as the need for a teaching component as a part of the behavior plan were also mentioned by some of the study participants during interviews. School psychologists and special education teachers all expressed benefits to having the support of school administrators during the FBA and BIP process. Although every participant felt supported, they each described a different level of administrator involvement with school psychologists generally reporting less direct involvement from administrators during the process than special education teachers.

After further examining the themes discovered through completing the interviews several recommendations were concluded related to future research opportunities, graduate training programs and practical recommendations for school personnel. Future

researchers are encouraged to expand the literature on FBAs and BIPs by exploring the concepts with larger populations and in different types of educational settings. Graduate training programs are encouraged to develop a more directed approach to teaching practices and procedures related to developing and implementing FBAs and BIPs. School personnel are encouraged to add components such as building level training opportunities and establishing a designated liaison to assist teams with the process.

School leaders and policy makers are important links in the chain of consistency. In order to effectively support staff school leaders need to be knowledgeable about the FBA and BIP process. As an executive leader, advocacy for others is one of the main functions of the role. In relation to supporting the process of developing and implementing FBAs and BIPs executive leaders can establish a presence at many stages. Structurally, executive leaders can advocate for building time within staff schedules to allow for teams to meet for FBA and BIP related purposes. Executive leaders can assist staff with reframing their perspective on specific behavior incidents by incorporating time to discuss student behavior plans during supervision. Placing an emphasis on the usefulness of behavior data, executive leaders can encourage the consistent collection of data by staff, in turn targeting a portion of the problem identified related to inconsistent practices. Additionally, using strength-based supervision (SBS) practices as described by Newman et al., (2017), can help foster growth amongst school personnel and can be useful when discussing FBA and BIP concepts during supervision.

Teachers can be viewed as role-implementers as well as agents of social justice, which from an educator's standpoint can be viewed as helping students adapt to an educational setting (Pantic, 2017). As agents of changes teachers are in a position to

advocate for student needs. Pantic, (2017) argued supporting the development of teachers as agents of change is a strategy for promoting social justice. When considering the utilization of functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention plans from a social justice standpoint it can be argued that educators need more assistance when trying to support student behavioral needs using these types of plans. Underfunded and understaffed school settings are likely to see more of an issue with regards to effectively developing and implementing FBAs and BIPs due to the strain on available resources.

As previously mentioned, managing disruptive behavior is an important component of educating students. Unfortunately, many students are being sent out of the classroom and end up missing out on valuable instruction which ultimately can have a negative impact on student achievement (Archambault et al., 2009; Janosz, et al., 2008; Stephan et al., 2013). Based on the conclusions of this study compared with previous literature, if educators are able to do a better job of supporting student behavioral needs it can indirectly impact student achievement, raising graduation rates and better preparing students for adulthood.

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Appendix A

Participant Selection Criteria

Inclusion Criteria: The research sample will include three to five school psychologists, three to five special education teachers and three to five school administrators who are employed at MEGA and are involved in managing student behaviors through the use of behavior plans. The research sample will consist of participants who have experience working in the field of education with students who are at least 14 years of age and experience with functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention plans.

School psychologists were selected because they are typically involved in the process of developing FBAs and BIPs within a school setting. Special education teachers were selected because they are typically responsible for the implementation of the behavior intervention plans as they work most directly with the student for an extended period of the school day. School administrators were selected because they are involved in the process of managing student behaviors from the standpoint of supporting staff with plan development and implementation. As a team, school psychologists, special education teachers, and school administrators work collaboratively to address problem student behavior.

Appendix B

E-mail Transcription to Recruit Study Participants

Dear _____,

I am a doctoral student at St. John Fisher College conducting a study on examining the development and implementation of functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention plans through the experiences of school personnel. I am requesting your participation, which will consist of individual interviews about your perceptions/experience with managing student behaviors through the use of behavior plans.

Individual interviews will take place at a mutually convenient time and location. There will be one interview for each participant lasting approximately one hour, with the possibility of extending the time of the interview or scheduling a follow up interview if needed to collect the necessary information. The focus of the conversation will be on managing student behaviors through the process of functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention plans.

With your permission, I will record our conversation with a digital voice recorder. The interviews will be transcribed, analyzed and coded to identify themes. To protect your privacy, the recordings and transcriptions will not contain any personally identifying information and will be kept in a secured password protected file. Your identity will remain anonymous throughout the study and after the dissertation has been completed. The results of the study may be presented at conferences and publications in academic journals. You may withdraw from the study or refuse to answer any particular questions without penalty at any time.

Please let me know if you are interested in participating and I will contact you with more details about the study. I appreciate your participation and assistance in completion of this study and would be happy to share a copy of the report once it is completed, if you are interested.

My faculty advisor is Dr. Marie Cianca (585) 889-3878.

Sincerely,

Chastity R. Murray

Appendix C

St. John Fisher College Informed Consent Form

Title of Study: Examining the Development and Implementation of Functional Behavior Assessments and Behavior Intervention Plans Through the Experiences of School Personnel.

Name of Researcher: Chastity R. Murray (585)967-0284 or crm01932@sjfc.edu

Faculty Supervisor: Dissertation Chairperson: Dr. Marie Cianca

Phone for further information: (585) 899-3878

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of the proposed study is to gain an understanding of the necessary components for developing Functional Behavior Assessments and effective steps for implementing Behavior Intervention Plans from key stakeholders involved in the behavior management process. The study will aim to collect information from a total of 9 to 15 participants (3 -5 school psychologists, 3 -5 special education teachers and 3 -5 administrators). School psychologists can provide information regarding procedures for plan development since they are often involved with managing student behaviors. Special education teachers can provide information regarding implementation of behavior plans because they typically work directly with the student on a regular basis and are most likely to be responsible for implementing the behavior plan. Administrators can provide information regarding supporting the development and implementation of behavior plans from a leadership standpoint. The study aims to identify training approaches for assessing behavior and highlight the practices that participants identify for effectively developing and supporting the implementation of behavior plans.

Place of the Study: Interviews will be conducted individually at a mutually convenient location; some examples may include: a public library, a coffee shop or the participant's office.

Length of Participation: Interviews are estimated to last approximately one hour or until the participant has responded to each of the interview questions. Additional time may be needed depending upon the length of participant responses. All interviews will be recorded using a digital recorder; the interviews will then be transcribed, analyzed and coded to identify themes.

Risk and Benefits: Minimal risk exists when the probability of and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research are not greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine tests. There are no additional anticipated emotional or physical risks to participating in this study.

Methods for Protecting Confidentiality: Confidentiality will be maintained throughout the course of the study. Any personally identifying information such as names will be replaced with a pseudonym. Interviews will occur in a public location while taking into

account privacy and security during the meeting. All interviews will be audio recorded and the recordings will be submitted to a transcription service. The use of a transcription service will allow for an unbiased transcription of the audio data into a written format. To avoid any confidentiality breaches when using a transcription service, the researcher will take precautions such as removing any identifying information from materials, using a pseudonym in place of the participants' names and using a professional transcription service for an added sense of security and accountability. Interview data, recordings and any supporting documentation will be maintained in a locked cabinet for a period of three years after the dissertation process. Upon completion of the three-year storage period, all participant files and documentation associated with the study will be destroyed.

Your Rights: As a research participant, you have the right to:

1. Have the purpose of the study, and the expected risks and benefits fully explained to you before you choose to participate.
2. Withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.
3. Refuse to answer a particular question without penalty.
4. Be informed of the results of the study.
5. Be informed of the results of the study.

I have read the above, received a copy of this form, and I agree to participate in the above named study.

Print Name (Participant)	Signature	Date
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Print Name (Researcher)	Signature	Date
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If you have any further questions regarding this study, please contact the researcher listed above. If you experience emotional or physical discomfort due to participation in this study, please contact the Health and Wellness Center at (585) 385-8280 for appropriate referrals.

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of St. John Fisher College has reviewed this project. For any concerns regarding this study and/or if you experience any physical or emotional discomfort, you can contact Jill Rathbun by phone at 585.385.8012 or by e-mail at irb@sjfc.edu.

Appendix D

Interview Protocol

Introduction: I would like to thank you for taking the time to participate in the interview and assist with the collection of information relevant to the topic of managing student behaviors. The purpose of the interview is to better understand the process of conducting functional behavior assessments and implementing behavior intervention plans from the perspective of school personnel that are involved with managing student behaviors. The interview will last approximately one hour.

The interview will be audio recorded and then transcribed using a professional transcription service. After your interview is completed, I will remove any identifiable data and assign a pseudonym to your file in order to protect your identity prior to submitting the recording for transcription.

Is there a particular name you would like me to use for purposes of this study?

Before beginning the interview, I want to make you aware of a couple of points:

1. If at any time, you do not want to provide a response to a particular question, please let me know and we will then move on to the next question.
2. If you have any questions at any time during the interview, please feel free to ask them.

Ok, are you ready to get started with the interview questions?

Demographic Questions

1. How many years have you worked in the field of education?
 - a. Within the field of education, have you ever held any positions other than your current job title?
2. What is the grade level of the students that you typically serve?

Interview Protocol

1. Tell me about the training you experienced with developing functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention plans.
 - a. What formal training/coursework were you exposed to in graduate school?
 - b. What formal training is available through your employer? (Specifically, which training opportunities have you participated in?)

2. How does the agency you work for provide professional development around behavior management practices?

- a. What resources are available within your organization to support managing behavior through the use of FBAs and BIPs.

Think concept of direct training from PRIME model (Sanetti et al., 2014)

3. Tell me about your experience with developing functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention plans.

- a. What strategies are used to develop the plan?
- b. How do you identify the problem to be addressed?

4. Tell me about your experience with implementing (or supporting the implementation of) behavior intervention plans.

- a. Share about your methods for implementation
 - Detailed logical planning (action planning)
 - Barrier identification and development (coping planning)

5. Describe your experienced with treatment integrity (delivering an intervention in the way it is intended as designed).

- a. How do you ensure treatment integrity?
- b. How do you review the intervention and/or make modifications?
- c. How do you identify the logistics of each step and needed resources?
- d. How do you identify potential barriers to implementation and possible strategies to address the barriers?

6. Tell me about the level of administrative support you receive for developing and implementing FBAs and BIPs.

- a. How supportive is administration in providing access to trainings on developing and implementing behavior plans?

- i. Can you share any examples?

How are administrators involved when the team is problem-solving potential barriers to implementation and ways to address those barriers?

Appendix E

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol Development Chart

<p>RQ1: What types of training do school psychologists and special education teachers receive to develop functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention plans?</p>	<p>RQ2: What do school psychologists and special education teachers identify as effective strategies for the development and implementation of functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention plans?</p>	<p>RQ3: How is the development and implementation of functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention plans supported by administration?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tell me about the training you experienced with developing functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention plans. [SP, SE, A, C1, C2] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. <i>What formal training/coursework were you exposed to in graduate school?</i> b. <i>What formal training is available through your employer and that you have participated in?</i> ▪ How does the agency you work for provide professional development around behavior management practices? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. <i>What resources are available within your organization to support managing behavior through the use of FBAs and BIPs.</i> [SP, SE, A] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tell me about your experience with developing functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention plans. [SP, SE, A, C1, C3] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. <i>What strategies are used to develop the plan?</i> b. <i>How do you identify the problem to be addressed?</i> ▪ Tell me about your experience with implementing behavior intervention plans. [SP, SE, A, C1, C3] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. <i>Share about your methods for implementation</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Detailed logical planning (action planning) -Barrier identification and development (coping planning) ▪ Describe your experience with treatment integrity (delivering an 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tell me about your experience with supporting the implementation of behavior intervention plans. [SP, SE, A, C2] ▪ Tell me about the level of support you receive from administrators for developing and implementing FBAs and BIPs. [SP, SE, A, C2] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. <i>How supportive is administration in regards to providing access to trainings on developing and implementing behavior plans?</i> b. <i>How involved is the administrators when the team is problem-solving potential barriers to implementation and ways to address those barriers?</i>

	<p>intervention in the way it is intended as designed).</p> <p><i>a. What was helpful/effective? (think planning for ways to maintain the intervention – action and coping planning)</i> [SP, SE, A, C2, C3]</p> <p><i>a. How do you ensure treatment integrity?</i></p> <p><i>b. How do you review the intervention and/or make modifications?</i></p> <p><i>c. How do you identify the logistics of each step and needed resources?</i></p> <p><i>d. How do you identify potential barriers to implementation and possible strategies to address the barriers?</i></p>	
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Key:

SP – question will be asked to school psychologists

SE – question will be asked to special education teachers

A – question will be asked to administrators

PRIME components (Sanetti et al., 2014)

C1 – component 1: implementation planning

C2 – component 2: assessment of implementation intention and sustainability self-efficacy (action planning)

C3 – component 3: strategies to increase implementation intention and/or sustainability, self-efficacy (coping planning)